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BORN ARISTOCRAT

• A STORY OF THE STAGE •





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A BORN ARISTOCRAT

A STORY OF THE STAGE

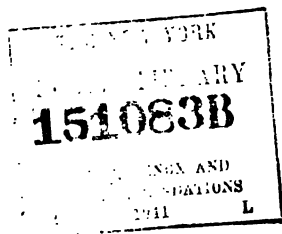


BY
MATTHEW WHITE, JR.



NEW YORK
FRANK A. MUNSEY
1898





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FRANK A. MUNSEY

A BORN ARISTOCRAT.

I.

BARBARA MAKES UP HER MIND.

THE crowd extended across the sidewalk, almost to the curbstone. Wailing cries of children were heard even above the clang of the cable cars.

"They are starving," some one exclaimed, and he almost ran into Barbara Van Dyke as he dashed off towards the drug store, on the opposite corner of the street.

"Starving!" she repeated to herself, and the impulse to hurry past suddenly gave place to a sort of morbid desire to look on the result of a condition the very mention of which chilled the blood at her heart.

The throng was clustered about the open door of a store, and Barbara's progress was quickly barred. But there were many eager to tell the facts, and it did not take her long to learn that a man in search of work had dropped in exhaustion from lack of food, that his wife had fallen beside him from the same cause, and that it was

their three little children from whom the cries proceeded.

Sick at heart Barbara turned away and came face to face with a woman who had just stepped out of her carriage.

"Why, Barbara Van Dyke!" she exclaimed. "I haven't seen you in ages! Where are you keeping yourself? And how is your dear sister? Such a charming girl, I am sure, and so talented. That plaque she painted for me has been so much admired. But whatever is the matter here?"

"Only a couple of people starving to death."

Barbara's voice sounded to her own ears as though it came from some one else. She had never realized before that her unhappy lot was making her bitter, but Mrs. Stanton's conventional tones seemed to rouse all the cynicism within her.

This sleek, well fed, well dressed woman of the world would have passed her with merely a nod did she know that the Van Dyke girls were seen no more in "society" because they were poor.

Yes, that was the word—*poor*. Barbara repeated it grimly under her breath while she listened to Mrs. Stanton's "Dear me, how shocking! I wonder if they have no friends."

"Yes, they have found some now," she replied the next instant, as women pressed past

them with loaves of bread in their hands or bundles of groceries, which they were eager to bestow on the sufferers.

"How good the world is, after all!" Mrs. Stanton remarked complacently. "But come, Barbara, my dear, won't you let me drive you home? I wanted to ask about a package at the express office, but it is quite impossible to get in the place now."

Barbara hesitated an instant, then a sudden resolve possessed her.

"You are very kind, Mrs. Stanton," she said, "but I am afraid it would take you too much out of your way. We are living now quite a distance over on the west side."

"That is my direction, you know. Just give John the number and step inside after me. I must get to my vinaigrette. This crowd has quite upset me."

The carriage once started, Mrs. Stanton began to talk on the trials of having to go to the dress-maker's so many times to be fitted, and the annoyance her servants caused her, or the burdens imposed by having to keep up with the conventions of "society."

Barbara sat back amid her unwonted luxury of coach cushions and listened to it all.

"What will she say when she sees where the carriage stops?" she asked herself. "It will be

a dramatic way in which to break our 'come down' to her."

But already they were well over toward the river. Mrs. Stanton looked out of the window, noted the throngs of noisy children in the street and the dingy look of the flat houses.

"Do you think John understood your directions, my dear?" she remarked.

"Oh, yes. We are almost there now. You know I warned you that it would be taking you out of your way. Here we are now. See the number? 435. I am almost afraid to ask you to call, for it is up four flights of stairs, and there is no elevator except the kitchen dummy. So much obliged. Good night, Mrs. Stanton. Pray remember me most kindly to your husband."

Barbara shut the carriage door with a bang and then dashed through the swarm of children that had suddenly sprung up in her path, till she gained the shelter of the narrow hallway. But it was not a shelter for long.

"Say, Miss Van Dyke, you came home in a coach, didn't you?"

A small boy had hurried in after her, and there were more to follow.

"Yes, Billy," she said, as she started wearily up the stairs. "I'm a regular Cinderella, didn't you know it? That was my fairy godmother, and the coach will be a pumpkin and the horses

turn into white mice before she ever comes here again. Which is perfectly true," she added to herself as, half hysterical, she burst into the little flat on the top floor.

"I've seen Mrs. Stanton, people," she announced. "She brought me home in her carriage, and now I've sent her home in a fit—of mortification and disgust."

A pretty girl, with big, innocent blue eyes, looked up from the bristol board on which she was outlining a drawing by the center table. A tall woman, with lines of anxiety impressed on a face that was intensely patrician in its contour, came out from the kitchen beyond, bread knife in hand.

"What have you done now, Barbara?" the latter asked patiently, sinking into a chair.

"Met one of our fashionable friends, and let her understand the truth. Surely there can't be anything wrong in that."

Barbara laid off her hat, went over to her sister, took the fair face between her two hands, and kissed it.

"What truth?" Mrs. Van Dyke wanted to know. "I don't understand you, Barbara."

"The truth about us; that we are no longer in the ring; that our money has gone, and that consequently we are not now fit persons for her to associate with."

"Oh, Barbara, you didn't *tell* her that?"

Freda looked up with a startled expression, and put her hand gently into her sister's.

"No, pet. I was perfectly polite. I allowed her to do all the talking. I simply gave her an object lesson by letting her see where we live."

"But why was there necessity of doing that, Barbara?" began Mrs. Van Dyke, when her daughter interrupted her.

"Because, mother, Mrs. Stanton is as shallow as the brook that ran through our old place in Vermont. She has no use for anybody who cannot move in her set, and the quicker we let her know the truth the better it will be."

"But she might be able——"

"Well, what could she do for us?"

Barbara sat down and calmly faced her family.

"Could she make editors see any good in my little stories they are always sending back, or in Freda's drawings that they never use? Pardon me, dear, but we might as well admit the truth. We must try to get something else to do, something besides so called respectable work. I'm going to answer advertisements at once."

Barbara ceased suddenly, and there was a silence in the little box of a room. Mrs. Van Dyke, heaving a deep sigh, went back to her preparations for supper. Freda's head dropped suddenly on the sketching board before her.

Her sister sprang forward instantly to fall to her knees by her side, and put her dark head close to the golden one.

"I'm a stupid, pet," she whispered. "Don't cry. You know the old story about the length of time geniuses must wait till their work is appreciated."

"But I'm not a genius," sobbed Freda. "I know that as well as—as the editors and you do. And I'm not sure that I want to be. I want not to have to worry, but—but to be taken care of like the other girls I used to know, and—oh, I'm a selfish thing to make it harder for you this way, but it is so awful to be poor!"

Barbara, with a swift recollection of the scene she had witnessed on Broadway, shivered involuntarily and hugged her sister the tighter as she whispered :

"But you needn't worry, pet. I'm big and strong and not afraid of things or people. There must be something I can do in this great city. Why, this is the woman's age, and who knows but we'll all be rich again?"

Barbara Van Dyke was just twenty years old, tall, dark, and almost regal, with a beauty of a type that is not often seen. When an unfortunate speculation swept away Mr. Van Dyke's fortune, she was a tower of strength to the family, simply in their realization that she was a member of it.

This strength of character must have come to her from some remote ancestor, for her mother was weak and wavering, and her father never held up his head again after the loss of prestige he had sustained. His mind became seriously affected and he was sent to a private institution managed by an old friend of the family. Out of the wreck a lump sum was left, too small to allow of the income being used, and the daily diminishing of the little hoard was a circumstance that kept Barbara awake night after night, planning, planning.

Mrs. Van Dyke's pride had hitherto kept her from doing more than trying to dispose of her own hastily written stories and her sister's sketches. The wife kept clinging to the hope that some miracle would restore her husband to his former vigor of body and mind.

But this night, after Freda had gone to bed, Barbara sat by her mother's side and told her of the incident at the express office.

"I must get something to do," she added. "I shall go wild if we live on like this—blindly. You must consent to my trying to obtain office work of some kind."

Mrs. Van Dyke wept, bewailed her bitter fate, but finally consented, and that night Barbara slept in comparative peace, little recking the pitfalls in the new path.

II.

THE FIRST PLUNGE.

THE next morning Mrs. Van Dyke tried to recall her consent to Barbara's seeking office work.

"Winter is coming on," she said. "It will be dark before five o'clock, and you'll have to come home alone."

"Thousands of other girls do the same thing," retorted Barbara. "Besides, the streets are crowded at that hour, and that in itself is a protection. And now to see what to apply for."

She had gone out early and bought some morning papers. Freda was looking over her shoulder as she picked up the first one, and when two pages of advertisements were opened clapped her hands together and pointed to the center of one of them.

"There's just the thing, Barbara!" she exclaimed. "Companion! Now that is a nice, clean, respectable occupation. And see, there are one—two—three—yes, seven chances for you. You're sure to get one of them if you go right away."

"But they might want you to live with them all the time, Barbara," interjected Mrs. Van Dyke fearfully, "and we must stick together, you know."

"Don't worry, dear. And, Freda, you will certainly need spectacles at this rate. Look at the head of the column and you will see that those seven 'snaps,' as you would call them, are under 'Work Wanted.'

"Everything else seems to be, too. No, here's what I'm looking for—'Help Wanted—Female.' Listen!" and she began to read:

"WANTED.—A good, respectable girl or middle aged woman for general housework; must be well recommended and a good cook; also a good washer and ironer; two in family."

"Barbara!" cried her mother and sister in horrified chorus.

"Well, then, perhaps you prefer this. It's the only other one in the whole paper. All the rest are from people who want work, not workers.

"WANTED.—A superior young Protestant woman to do all the work, except washing and ironing, of small, convenient country house, for family of two; neatness, promptness, good plain cooking, and good temper required; highest references from former employers demanded; excellent wages paid to right person; apply by letter, giving full particulars; women not fulfilling these requirements need not answer. German, Canadian, or Swede preferred.

"There, I flatter myself I could fill that bill in every particular, except possibly the last one.

Still, I might succeed in passing myself off for a Canadian."

"Barbara Van Dyke!" broke in Freda, "the idea of your wasting time over such an idea."

"I'm not so sure that it is wasting time. I'm young, I'm a Protestant, there's no washing or ironing to be done, and only two in family. Oh, that's the treasure of a place for the treasure all mistresses are looking for. But then I wouldn't have you two with me, so we'll pass on;" and she picked up another paper.

There was silence in the little room for a time, while anxious eyes pored over the closely packed columns. But for all there were so many notices, nearly all called for experience or skill in some special branch, and the rest were for house servants. Only one seemed in the slightest degree promising. This was for "bright young girl to address wrappers, \$4 weekly."

"I'll write for that," Barbara announced finally. "It isn't much, but perhaps they'll let me do it at home."

She sat down at once, wrote a brief note in her best, but plainest hand, then put on her hat and went out to mail it.

"I may not be back at once," she announced, and then closed the door before any questions could be put to her.

Her inspection of the advertisements in those

two papers had discouraged her at the outset of her new departure.

"I see that I must put my pride in my pocket and go to one of father's friends," was her thought.

And she determined to act on it without consulting her family or giving her resolution time to cool. It seemed to her that those Hindoos in the time of the Sepoy rebellion could have felt no worse when they were marched up to the cannons' mouths. Still, there was the recollection of that scene of the starving people on the street the night before, to spur her on.

"Mother hasn't over \$275 left. I am sure of that," she reflected. "And it costs us all of fifty a month to live."

Then, as she walked on from the letter box toward the Elevated, her mind busied itself trying to determine which friend to go to first. They had seen none of them since their return to town, two months ago, except Mrs. Stanton, the night before.

"And I can never bring myself to appeal to them," Barbara thought.

Mr. Stanton was a prominent lawyer in Wall Street. She had seen very little of him during their time of intimacy with the family, but her recollection was of a kindly, meek old gentleman, quite subservient to his wife's will.

There were the Randolphs. She and Freda had been members of Mrs. Randolph's subscription dance winter before last. Mr. Randolph was a man of distinguished presence, overwhelmingly polite and gracious. He was a banker, but the exact location of his office she did not know. But it would be an easy matter to find it in the directory. There were not likely to be two Courtland Randolphs in the city.

"I will go to him first," she decided. "Even if he has nothing for me, he may be able to put me in the way of getting something."

At the next drug store she ascertained the address, and was soon being whirled toward Broad Street. Arrived at the palatial office of the banking institution of which Mr. Randolph was the head, she was met by a colored man, who informed her that the president was engaged just then, but that she might send in her name.

Barbara took one of her cards, scratched out the Madison Avenue address—the sole reminder of happier days—and sent it in.

"I wish I had broken the ice by giving him a hint on it of what I wanted," she thought, as she sat quaking. "He'll probably think I've called in the interest of some charity bazar."

In this she was near the truth, and it was not long before she was ceremoniously ushered into the ornate private office of the banker.

"Good morning, Miss Van Dyke," he exclaimed, advancing with extended hand. "It is indeed a long time since I had the pleasure of seeing you. Pray take that easy chair. I was under the impression that you had gone to Egypt, or no, was it a tour of the world?"

By this time Barbara was shaking like the oft quoted aspen leaf. It was going to be even harder than she had supposed.

"No," she managed to answer. "We have been in the country for a year, and now——"

"Now you are back in town preparing for the whirl of gaieties that I tell my girls is enough to drive them dizzy long before Christmas."

"No, not that either," poor Barbara struggled on. "The truth is, Mr. Randolph, we are very far from gay. I thought perhaps you might have heard. We have lost——"

The banker pulled a serious face on the instant.

"My dear Miss Van Dyke," he interposed, "I crave your pardon; but I have such a wretched memory. Let me see, was it your mother, or——"

He paused, waiting for his caller to fill in the embarrassing gap. But Barbara felt a hysterical desire to laugh. She summoned all her faculties and managed to go on.

"No, it is not death, Mr. Randolph, but another sort of loss. I have come to you to see

if you cannot advise me how I may get something to do."

It was told now, and Barbara sank back, almost with a sigh of relief, grimly conscious that it was the banker's turn to be uncomfortable. And uncomfortable he obviously was !

"I am surprised—I may say shocked, to hear it," he mumbled ; "but we are all subject to these fluctuations here in America. Up today, down tomorrow. It may be my turn next."

And with the smile at this feeble attempt at wit, the banker regained his composure. But Barbara was obdurate. She knew she was expected to say something, but he had not answered her yet. She determined to remain silent until he had. Certainly it would be no harder for him to deny her request than it had been for her to make it.

"You know we employ no ladies here except a stenographer," he finally said. "You have not learned that, have you?" and Barbara thought she detected a shade of anxiety in his tones.

"No ; I cannot even use the typewriter," she replied, watching his face closely, and certain now that a look of relief came into it at her words.

"Well, perhaps if I were in his place I would feel the same," she reflected, in his justification.

"It would be unpleasant to be paying a salary to a young lady whom I had taken out to dinner or handed into my carriage."

Barbara rose.

"I should have thought of that before I came," she added, before he could think of a suitable answer to her admission of incompetency.

"I am exceedingly sorry, Miss Van Dyke," he answered, becoming gracious again in the expectation of her speedy departure. "Here, let me give you a line to Macdonald, president of the Knickerbocker Insurance Company. They employ any number of young ladies simply to do clerical work."

"Thank you very much ;" and she sat down again to wait for the note.

As soon as she had received this she hurried out, conscious that he had not asked after her mother or sister, nor requested her to leave her present address, in order that his wife and daughters might call.

III.

A SERIES OF REPULSES.

THE offices of the Knickerbocker Insurance Company were close at hand. Barbara walked towards them listlessly. Somehow her interview with Mr. Randolph had left a bad taste in her mouth, to put it metaphorically.

They were evidently very busy that morning at the Knickerbocker, and it was some time before Barbara could find any one to take in her letter of introduction.

Finally the colored man came hastily through the hallway and she preferred her request, handing over the note.

"Yes'm, I'll see'm," mumbled the darky, and made off, leaving the caller standing there.

And it was at this instant that she heard her name pronounced in accents of delighted surprise :

"Miss Van Dyke, don't you remember me?"

She was puzzled for an instant to know from where the voice proceeded, as there was no one at the moment in the corridor save herself. Then, turning her head, through the wicket in the glass

partition of the clerks' quarters she saw Allan Thurwell.

As by magic the walls of that big insurance building on bustling Broadway melted away, and acres of Adirondack woods took their place. But they were only the background to the mental picture that swiftly rose before her.

There was the boat on the lake, in which she had sat so many times during that fortnight two summers before, while the young man whose handsome head she now saw framed by the clerk's window rowed her lazily beneath outspreading trees or close to lofty boulders, the while they talked of many things and grew to think they knew each other well. And this was the first time she had seen him since.

For an instant she forgot her dejection of spirits, lost sight of the errand on which she had come.

"It is awfully nice to see you again, Mr. Thurwell," she said, in her frank manner, and they shook hands through the wicket.

"Of course it is too much to hope that you called here on purpose to honor me in this way," he laughed.

"Seeing that I did not know you were here, I am afraid you cannot so much flatter yourself. I had a letter to one of your officers, and——"

"That stupid Sam has left you standing there.

He's a new man. One second and I will be with you."

Thurwell quitted his desk, and in another moment he had conducted her into a little reception room.

"If you will allow me, I shall be glad to stay until the gentleman to whom you have sent your card arrives."

"I hope you will. I'm rather frightened in this big place. Fancy my being scared of anything. Do you remember how devoutly I hoped we might meet a bear the day we climbed West Mountain?"

"There is no danger of my forgetting that day, nor the night we gave our travesty on 'Romeo and Juliet.' What a blithering idiot I made of myself in the part, and how patient you were with me!"

"Idiot? Why, you were screamingly funny, which was what we all should have been. I'm so fond of Shakspeare that every few minutes I fell to taking my rôle seriously."

"And, by Jove, you'd make a hit as the real thing! If ever you do play it straight at some one of those amateur entertainments, I hope you'll give me a chance to invest in a ticket. I'd scrimp on lunches for a week, if need be, to pay the price."

But Barbara heard scarcely a word he said.

Two gentlemen had just walked into the room from an inner one, and halted for an instant close to the sofa on which Barbara and Thurwell were seated. The elder of the two held an open letter in his hand, and the words Barbara caught were :

“Confound Randolph ! This is the second woman he’s sent to me within a month. Our waiting list is almost as big as our working force now. I’ll ”—then the men passed on into the corridor.

The color rushed into Barbara’s cheeks in a flood, then died quickly out, leaving her pale, almost trembling.

“I—I think I will not wait,” she stammered. “I do not feel very well. It is so warm in here, and I think the air——”

Thurwell sprang up and offered his arm, deep concern in his face. But she waved it aside.

“Thanks,” she said. “I shall be all right as soon as I am outside. You need not come, Mr. Thurwell ; I am afraid I have detained you from your work too long already. Good morning ;” and she put out her hand.

“I will walk with you to the elevator, at least. Is there any message you wish to leave ?”

“None, thank you. Some other time. I am very glad indeed to have seen you again. Good by.”

•

The door of the elevator shaft shot back with a sharp clang and drowned whatever response he made. She stepped into the car and quickly sank out of sight. She wished she might go on sinking till she reached the bowels of the earth. The ignominy of being batted about from office to office like a shuttlecock was galling to her. She felt as if some weight were about her neck, dragging her down through all sorts of degradations to physical suffering at the end.

"They say that poverty is respectable, only the shame of it ignoble," she reflected. "I will try to remember that."

And it was with this meager consolation she emerged again into the glare of Broadway. She was without plans, without hope. It seemed that she had come to the end of her resources, and that there was nothing left for her but to go home, confess herself defeated, and trust that she might obtain the four dollars weekly from addressing those wrappers.

The thought of home brought Allan Thurwell to her mind again.

"I wonder if he expected me to ask him to call," she mused. "But I could not do it with everything so uncertain. He might arrive just as the landlord is dispossessing us. That would be like a scene in a play, for a fact—distracted family—irate landlord—horrificed lover——"

But here she checked the current of her vivid imagination, while once again the color dyed her cheeks ; but this time it was of a different composition.

"Allan Thurwell is a gentleman through and through," she said to herself. "I don't believe there is a particle of false pride about him. I wish I had asked him to call ; but it is too late now. I shall probably never see him again."

And she promptly set to work to put him out of her mind, along with all the other pleasant happenings of the summer she had spent under the chaperonage of Mrs. Stanton in the north woods.

But the thought of Mrs. Stanton recalled that lady's husband to her mind.

"I might as well put my pride in my pocket and go to him as the very last resource. He surely can't treat me any worse than Mr. Macdonald did."

She had been walking aimlessly up town ; now she turned and made her way back to Wall Street. Mr. Stanton was ready of access and seemed rather glad of the chance to have a chat with his caller.

"Sit down, my dear, and tell me all about it," he began. "Marie gave me some intimation last night that you had sustained a fall in fortunes, and I am glad that you felt free to

come to me for advice. Now, what can I do for you?"

"Tell me how I can get something to do. I can't typewrite, nor take shorthand, nor keep books, nor teach children, nor yet fashion a gown. And the rest of the avenues of employment open to women seem already full."

"But, my dear Miss Barbara, surely things are not so very bad with you that you must go out and fight in the struggle for existence shoulder to shoulder with men. Are there not—pardon me—are there not some of your relatives, in other cities perhaps, to whom you and your sister could make yourselves useful in exchange for the home that would be provided?"

It was fortunate that Mr. Stanton was near sighted, or he might have been hurt by the flash that came into his caller's eyes at his words. As it was, he proceeded in his calm, deliberate fashion.

"To be sure, this method might involve a separation of the members of the family, but surely that is better than for one of you to—well, to have to suffer from some of the necessary drawbacks to even the softest berths in office life here in the city. Have you thought of that side of the matter, my dear?"

"No, Mr. Stanton, simply because we intend to stick together if that means starving together.

Besides, we have no relatives in a position to extend a helping hand."

It was on the tip of Barbara's tongue to add: "I am not asking charity, but work." She restrained herself, however, and rising, said "Good morning" instead.

"There!" she exclaimed, when the door closed behind her. "That finishes it. I'm going to confine myself to strangers after this. The impudence of the old man!"

Her indignation kept her spirits from sinking till the cable car she had boarded reached the shopping district. Here the sight of the women flitting in and out of stores with no more serious weight on their minds than the matching of ribbons or the choosing of dress goods recalled to her so vividly the old days that she turned resolutely away and gazed steadily out of the window on the other side for several blocks.

When she turned back again something else caught her eye that in some way instantly caused her to recollect certain words Allan Thurwell had spoken. And with them came another thought that almost took away her breath.

"No, no," she said to herself. "I must not think of it. Even were it to succeed, the price would be too heavy, too heavy."

And yet in spite of her resolutions, she thought of nothing else all the way home.

IV.

DISASTER UPON DISASTER'S HEAD.

WITH her hand on the door of the little flat, Barbara heard a man's voice inside ; a heavy voice which she did not recognize, but yet which seemed oddly familiar.

As soon as she entered the hallway Freda flew out and carried her into the tiny bedroom close at hand, closing the door behind them.

"Uncle Eben is here," she gasped. "He wants mamma to give him money. He says the family will be disgraced if she doesn't."

"How much does he want?" asked Barbara, with a calmness that surprised herself.

"Fifty dollars. He says he'll pay it back, though it's rightfully owing him for what he did for father years ago."

"And is mother going to give it to him?"

"I don't know. She told him we were very poor ourselves, but he's very much excited, and says there's nothing for him but suicide if he doesn't get it."

"Did he pay his fare all the way from Boston just to borrow fifty dollars in New York?"

"I suppose so, but he frightens me, talking so fiercely as he does."

"You stay here, pet, and I'll go in to see him. Don't worry. Even if mother has written him a check, we can stop payment at the bank."

"But she won't give him a check. She can't."

"Why? What do you mean? What has happened?"

Barbara turned toward her sister, fear of some new, unknown evil putting a tremor in her voice.

"After you went away this morning, mother was reading the papers you left behind. She saw the account of two bank failures and grew so nervous that she got me to go with her and draw out all we had in."

Barbara sank down on the bed.

"What has she done with it?" she inquired, striving to be calm.

"I have it here in my pocket. We had just got in when Uncle Eben came, and she gave it to me to keep while she went in to see him. Do you think we did wrong to take it out of the bank, Barbara?"

"Certainly you did. We are a hundred times more likely to lose it here than there. Come, we will go instantly and put it back."

"Without telling mother?"

"Yes, if we want to keep her from giving

nearly half of the little we've got to Uncle Eben."

"But if she doesn't, he may——"

"Fudge! If she does he'll drink it up as he did with all his own. I remember how he used to come to father. I've heard them talking when they thought I was too little to understand."

"But mother will worry about us and—the money."

"Here, I'll scribble a note to tell her it's all right;" and going to her desk, Barbara dashed off the following in lead pencil:

DEAR MOM:

The pet and I have gone out. The money is safe. Tell Uncle Eben you'll talk it over with me and send it to him, if I think best, which I won't.

BARBARA.

"There!" And fastening this conspicuously in the pincushion, Barbara helped her sister on with her jacket, and then they both stole out on tiptoe by the back way.

"You're almost as good as a brother, dear," whispered Freda, as they hurried down the stairs.

"Wish I was your brother. I'd go in and order Uncle Eben out. But where have you put that money?"

"In my pocket here, with my hand on it all the time."

"You'd better divide it, and let me take half. Then if we do lose——"

"Oh, don't speak of losing it," gasped Freda. "That would be worse than giving it to Uncle Eben."

They halted on a stair landing, first making sure that no one was coming, while Freda cautiously drew forth the precious store.

"You keep a hundred and fifty of it," said Barbara, effecting the division, and then, each clutching her pocket, the sisters hurried on.

"We'd better take the cable down," suggested Freda. "We can walk back. The quicker we get rid of this money the easier I'll feel."

"Hush! Don't talk so loud," Barbara cautioned her, glancing nervously around. "Yes, we can ride one way."

"Did you find anything to do, sister?" asked Freda, after they were seated in the car.

"Not yet, but that letter I sent off this morning may open the way to something more profitable than wrapper directing."

Barbara gave voice to a much greater hopefulness than she felt, but Freda must not be allowed to worry. For this reason she evaded furnishing particulars of her morning's experiences. They had nearly reached their destination, when a woman seated by the front window sprang up with a scream.

"It's running away, I know it is, just as those others have done!" she cried.

The gripman's gong had begun to clang furiously, and the car was rushing on at a continuous high speed, which betrayed the direful truth. Instantly all was confusion. The first woman's scream was quite drowned in the chorus of shrieks and groans that arose on every hand.

"Sit down! Keep quiet!" yelled the conductor. "There is no danger."

"Yes," added another man, calmly leaning back in his seat. "We are far safer than the people in front of us."

Bang went the car into an express wagon, knocking the driver from his seat and sending the passengers off into a fresh paroxysm of terror. Freda threw both her arms about her sister and began to sob piteously.

"Oh, Barbara, do you think we shall be killed?" she moaned. "And we came off without saying good by to mother."

"Hush! We are safe enough. They will soon stop the cable, and then it will be all right."

Barbara kept her eyes fixed steadily ahead, and she saw a scene which she never forgot. Wagons were scurrying out of the way like mad, men were shouting, policemen were waving their arms, and the windows and doorways of the stores were black with spectators, as for some military pageant.

The next instant, however, the vision was shut out, as the car crashed into the one ahead, and pushed it on, willy nilly. There was the bank they were bound for, and b-r-r-h! there was another crash into something else. The panic was frightful. Two men had already jumped from the car, and crowds could be seen bending over their prostrate bodies in the middle of the roadway.

Freda was by this time almost fainting with terror, and her screams fairly froze the blood in Barbara's veins. And then the car slowed up suddenly, and the next instant came to a stop. The telegraphic message had reached the power house.

As soon as she discovered that she was not hurt Freda began to laugh hysterically.

"Now it's all over, I'm glad I was in it, aren't you?" she said to Barbara, as they hurried toward the door.

Then her face went white, and she gasped out two terror stricken words:

"The money!"

"Not gone?"

Barbara felt a sudden weakness in her limbs she had not experienced during all the horrors of the runaway.

"It's not here;" and Freda turned her pocket inside out with a look of complete despair.

"Perhaps you dropped it on the floor," suggested Barbara. "We must go back and look."

But there was no trace of it to be found.

"What have you lost, ladies?" the conductor inquired.

"Money."

It seemed to Barbara she had not the strength to say more.

"Was it much, miss?"

"It was a hundred and fifty dollars," sobbed Freda, running her fingers up and down the seat in despairing thoroughness.

"My, that's bad!" exclaimed the man, with ready sympathy. "Are you certain you had it with you when you got on the car?"

"Yes, I kept my hand on it all the time."

"Except when the accident happened," interposed Barbara. "After that you had them both around my neck."

"Then, somebody's robbed me. Don't you remember there was a man sitting next me, Barbara? It seems to me he got in when we did. Do you remember what he looked like?" and Freda glanced anxiously up into the conductor's face.

"I'm afraid I don't, miss," he replied. "You see, the runaway's filled my mind so full of other things. But if you report your loss to a policeman perhaps he can get the money back."

But both the sisters knew this to be a forlorn hope. The hundred and fifty dollars, more than half their fortune, was gone. The theft must have been perpetrated during the height of the excitement, when everybody was so concerned for his own safety that he had no inclination or time to watch out for his neighbors' possessions.

By this time the passengers in the car were lost in the crowd ; and even were this not the case it would be quite impossible to fasten the guilt on any one of them. Barbara reported the matter to a policeman ; he promised to do what he could, and then the sisters, sick at heart, wearily trudged back along the thronged sidewalks to the bank.

"It's all my fault," Freda kept repeating. "Even in all the terror of that awful time I ought to have remembered to keep my hand on my pocket."

Barbara kept silent for a while, but finally turned on her sister almost fiercely.

"It is not your fault, Freda," she said. "You must not think that for one instant. It is all owing to my thinking I was doing a clever thing in getting the money out of Uncle Eben's way. But I will pay it back if I have to grind every inch of my pride into the very dust beneath my feet ;" and Barbara set her lips in a grim line that meant with her do or die.

V.

BARBARA TRIES THE LAST RESORT.

THE hundred and twenty five dollars were put back in the bank, and with a heavier weight pressing on their hearts than they had known in many a day, the sisters returned to the flat.

Barbara felt utterly crushed. A bit of diplomacy she had intended for the best had precipitated upon the family a terrible misfortune. Whatever her mother might say to her, she felt that she could never forgive herself.

Mrs. Van Dyke had evidently been listening for them. She opened the door before they could ring.

"Where have you been, and is the money safe?" were her first words.

"We've been on a fool's errand, mother, and half the money's gone. It's all my fault. I thought I was doing for the best, but I am not fit to be trusted. Scold me, heap on my head all the recriminations that come to your mind, for I deserve them all."

"My poor child, tell me all about it;" and the mother opened her arms to her eldest.

"No ;" and Barbara backed away. "You're just splendid, mom, to take it so nobly, but if I let you hug me I shall cry, and my eyes mustn't be red today, of all days. Has Uncle Eben gone?"

"Yes ; when he found I hadn't any money in the house he went off in a temper."

"Would you have given him the fifty dollars he wanted if you had had it?" asked Barbara quickly.

"I am afraid I would."

"Then, we've only lost a hundred dollars. Cheer up, Freda. And now let's have cocoa for lunch. I want to be strengthened mightily for a task I have before me this afternoon."

"What are you going to do?" asked Freda fearfully. Her sister's varying moods were a constant enigma to her.

"'Watch me,' as slangy boys say. Run along and start things while I 'fess to mother about the bank and the burglary."

Freda went off to the kitchen incredulous. She could scarcely believe that this sister of hers was the same creature who but a moment before had walked dejectedly by her side, as to a pillory. Now her eyes had a sparkle in them, her cheeks were burning as from some inward fire, and she talked almost ceaselessly.

"Don't worry, people," she told them at lun-

cheon. "I have a plan. Money may flow in upon us in streams."

"Barbara, my dear," remonstrated her mother, "what has come over you? If my neglecting to chide you for losing half our competency has turned your brain, as it seems to have done, I shall be obliged to start in as a scold at once. Tell me what you mean."

"Not now, mother dear. Tonight—this afternoon, as soon as I get back. I may be disappointed, you know. In that case, I will say nothing. But remember, whatever comes of it, it's all done for you—for you and the pet there."

"Let me go with you," begged Freda.

"Not even if it were to get back the one fifty," retorted Barbara, as she flew into her room and closed the door.

"Whatever does the girl intend to do?" sighed Mrs. Van Dyke, who at times reminded herself of a staid, respectable hen who has hatched out an irrepressible ostrich.

"I never saw her as queer as this," answered Freda. "She's going to do something desperate, I'm afraid. Coming along and talking about the loss of the money, she told me that she would pay it back if she had to grind every inch of her pride into the dust."

"Dear me, she must be going to borrow the money from somebody, some of our old friends.

You know she met Mrs. Stanton yesterday. But I can never consent to that. Barbara ! Barbara !” and Mrs. Van Dyke went to the closed door and began to knock for admittance.

“Yes,” came the response, evidently from a mouth full of pins.

“Let me in !” commanded her mother.

A pause, and then the door was flung open, to reveal Barbara radiant in her best gown and her most becoming bonnet.

“Yes, that is what she is going to do !” exclaimed her mother, as she beheld the vision of loveliness. “Barbara Van Dyke, I forbid you to go to any of our friends for money.”

“Mother !”

There was horror, reproach, stupefaction, in the utterance of the word.

“You spoke about restoring our fortunes,” explained Mrs. Van Dyke almost apologetically, “and here you are arrayed in your best, so I——”

“Thought I would stoop to beg ! Oh, mother, how could you ?”

“Then, why won’t you tell us what you are going to do, Barbara ?” broke in Freda. “It is your own fault if we have thought the worst.”

“What I am going to do is so much less terrible than that, that the mere act of comparison has taken a weight off my mind. You can trust

me not to do anything disgraceful, can't you, mother?"

"Of course, but why must you surround it with this atmosphere of mystery?"

"Well, I have my reasons, and, besides, the mystery will only endure for an hour or two. By the end of that time I may be back with a perfect budget of news to unfold. Now, kiss me good by and wish me luck," she added an instant later, turning from a final survey of herself in the glass.

She was irresistible in this mood, and mother and sister could do no less than her bidding.

Once on the street, Barbara's face underwent a transformation. Seriousness came into her eyes and her cheeks grew almost pale.

"If they only knew!" she kept repeating to herself. "Would they call it disgraceful? It is honest, at any rate."

She walked rapidly, as if fearful that her resolution would fail her before she had accomplished her purpose. Her way took her to that portion of the metropolis known as the "Tenderloin," and presently she came to a halt in front of the building which had caught her eye on the way from her trip to Wall Street, inspiring her with an idea to be used only as a last resort.

The loss of the money she construed as bringing this period about, and here she was, her

heart beating like a trip hammer, and every bit of her courage appearing to have oozed down into the toes of her shoes. She stood there on the sidewalk for a full minute, gazing straight at a list of names, not one of which she saw ; then, fearful lest she should attract the attention of passers by, she made a sudden dash forward and went inside.

Presenting herself at a window in the wall, she inquired, in a voice which seemed to belong to somebody else, if she could see Mr. Froley.

"What name?"

"Froley."

This time Barbara fairly shouted it, fearing lest her timidity had caused her to whisper before.

"Your name, I mean. Will you send up your card?"

"He doesn't know me," faltered Barbara, fumbling with her pocketbook.

She passed in the card, the fellow looked at it, and then picked up a rubber speaking tube that hung near at hand.

"Miss Van Dyke, to see Mr. Froley," he called out, while Barbara flushed to the roots of her hair.

There was a pause, while the man with the tube whistled an air from a comic opera under his breath, and Barbara felt as if she were wait-

ing to learn the verdict of a jury that had been trying her for murder.

"No, she says he doesn't know her," the man at the tube suddenly remarked, in reply to a question from the other end.

Another pause, and now it was the young man's turn to flush a trifle as he first looked at Barbara, and then put his mouth close to the orifice and said something which the anxious listener could not catch.

"Mr. Froley will see you."

"Yes?" said Barbara questioningly, almost stunned by the announcement.

"Just walk in through that door at your right, and his secretary will meet you."

Like one in a dream, Barbara followed directions, and was scarcely conscious of anything but darkness until a voice spoke out of the gloom:

"This way, Miss Van Dyke, if you please."

She followed along a devious way, up a long flight of stairs and down a short one, till finally she found herself in a beautiful room, her conductor gone, and a studious looking man seated at a desk before her. He was writing and did not look up for an instant, and Barbara was too frightened to make her presence known. Finally he dropped his pen, lifted his head, and "Oh!" was all he said as he caught sight of her.

"Will you be seated?" he added. "I am very busy, and if you will tell me what you wished to see me about as briefly as possible I shall be obliged."

"I wanted to know if you could give me a position."

Barbara wondered how she managed to get the words out. Her throat felt perfectly dry.

"H'm! Ever had any experience?"

"Once or twice in amateur theatricals."

"Can you sing?"

"A little."

"Think of some song you think you can render passably well, then tell me when you are ready;" and Mr. Froley resumed his writing.

Think of a song! Barbara could think of nothing but the horror of the thing she had done, now that she had passed the Rubicon.

VI.

THE DIE IS CAST.

No matter through what thrilling experiences she may be called upon to go, Barbara will never forget those moments—hours, they seemed—she spent in Mr. Froley's private office, supposedly thinking over the songs she knew; really quaking from fright.

"Well," said the manager presently, looking up from his writing, "have you decided on one? If so, I will ring for Mr. Reynolds, and you can go down stairs and sing it."

The knowledge that she would not be obliged to sing here in this small room, alone with the manager, was a source of such relief to her mind that she was instantly enabled to think of an air from "Wang" that had been such a favorite with her that the family had begged her to desist from its repetition.

She mentioned the name to Mr. Froley, who almost smiled, but answered simply, "I suppose that will do as well as anything," and pressed a button in the side of his desk.

"I wish to make it clear to you, Miss Van

Dyke," he added, "that I could not possibly have seen you this morning had not Miss Appleton's accident made it imperative that some one be put in her place immediately."

Barbara wanted to ask who Miss Appleton was, what sort of accident had befallen her, and the kind of position she filled, but as Mr. Froley at once returned to his writing, she simply said, "Yes, sir," and waited for the bell to be answered.

When Mr. Reynolds appeared, "Try this young lady's voice," was all the manager said, without raising his eyes.

"This way;" and the secretary indicated a narrow stairway leading to a room below.

Here there was a piano, but not much of anything else.

"What are you going to sing?"

Mr. Reynolds put the question in the same solemn tone he would have used to say, "Will you have a ham or a tongue sandwich?" at a funeral repast.

"Can you play your own accompaniment?" was the next question.

Whereupon Barbara, whose finger tips were like ice, sat down at the instrument and began at once. She had sung the first verse and was half way through the second when the sound of stamping was heard on the floor above.

"That will do," said Mr. Reynolds hurriedly.
"You need not sing any more."

Barbara actually felt the bricks of her air castle tumbling about her ears. She took her hands from the piano as though the keys had suddenly turned red hot.

"Excuse me a moment ;" and the secretary disappeared up the little stairway.

"I ought to have known," reflected Barbara, as she sat there disconsolately on the piano stool, drawing on her gloves. "I suppose, though, if things had turned out differently mother would have been heartsick. But I know of nothing else I can do that would bring in so much money."

"Come tomorrow morning to rehearsal at eleven o'clock. This way out, if you please."

But for an instant Barbera had not the strength to move. She was engaged, then. And she had imagined that Mr. Froley was so disgusted with her work that he could not have the politeness to wait till she had finished one song before bidding her begone !

"Thank you," was all she could think of to say when she finally realized that Mr. Reynolds was holding a door open for her.

Then, just as she was passing out, she recollected something.

"One thing I must know," she said. "How much is the salary to be?"

"Fifteen dollars a week is what the chorus usually get."

"Thank you," said Barbara again, adding: "Shall I send up my name from the box office?"

"Oh, no. Report at the stage door around the corner, and ask for Mr. Deering, the stage manager. And be sure you are on time."

With these words the secretary bowed her out into the lobby, and instantly vanished in the gloom behind him.

Barbara went out into the afternoon sunshine and the din of Broadway with everything making a new impression on her.

For weeks afterwards the unlighted electric sign of a certain store across the way was associated in her mind with her engagement at Froley's, simply because it was the first object in the street on which her eye rested after this astounding fact had been brought home to her. Even yet she could not realize it.

"After all, it was only luck, pure and simple. Mr. Froley as much as told me so."

She kept saying this to herself over and over as she walked homewards, until another thought crowded every other out of her brain.

"What will mother say?"

By the time she reached the flat Barbara was almost as frightened as at the moment when she had been ushered into Mr. Froley's office.

Mrs. Van Dyke was sewing by the window, and Frèda busy with her drawing, when Barbara opened the door and walked in on them.

"I am so glad you have come, my dear," began her mother. "I have worried about you all the afternoon. You made so much mystery about your errand that I have been thinking all sorts of terrible things."

"I even suggested that you might have gone to get a position on the stage," interjected Freda, with an incredulous laugh.

Barbara gave a little gasp, then seized the opening, and replied, "That's just what I've got!"

"Barbara!" Mrs. Van Dyke put both hands to her face, and it seemed as if she were cowering under a physical blow that had been dealt her.

Freda's drawing board went with a crash to the floor, and she sat there staring at her sister as if the latter had suddenly been transformed into a perfect stranger.

"I knew you would be shocked, of course," Barbara went on, coming over to stroke her mother's hair softly as she talked. "I should have thought you had mighty little feeling if you weren't shocked."

"But you told me I could trust you to do nothing disgraceful," Mrs. Van Dyke looked up to say, and there were tears in her voice.

"Did Edith Kingdon disgrace herself? Or Mary Anderson? Or Modjeska? It isn't the position, mother dear; it's the woman who fills it. The work itself is not dishonest."

"What theater will you be at, Barbara?" asked Freda, almost in a voice of awe.

"Froley's. I'm to go tomorrow at eleven to a first rehearsal and to sign the contract."

"But you must not sign it, Barbara. I forbid you!" exclaimed her mother. "It is monstrous that you, a Van Dyke, should stoop so low."

"Not more monstrous than for me to stand by and see us all go to the poorhouse. No, mother; I felt about it just as you do, and did not turn to it until it was left only as a last resort."

"But your father may——"

"Yes, he *may* recover; but if he does not within two months we will be homeless unless money is obtained from some source, and I have tried many this morning. I have not yet told you my experiences, but I will now."

Sitting down she detailed them all, omitting only mention of Allan Thurwell. Why she did not speak of him she could not herself have explained, excepting possibly because neither her mother nor sister had ever met him. Many a heartache would have been spared had his name only formed part of her present narrative.

"Now," she concluded, "is it any more disgraceful to get a position from a perfect stranger, even if it is to act on a stage, than to subject myself to humiliations from friends?"

"But it isn't the work itself, my dear," argued her mother, who was plainly "coming around."
"It's the surroundings, the atmosphere."

"There you will have to trust to my bringing up to show whether I am strong or weak. But now you will consent, won't you? I am to get fifteen dollars a week, which is more than I could earn in any other line at my command, for, you see, I'm not a skilled laborer."

At this instant there was a whistle up the kitchen tube, and Mrs. Van Dyke was obliged to hurry away to speak to a tradesman. Freda instantly rushed to put her arms about her sister's neck.

"Oh, Barbara!" she cried, "it must be heavenly to go behind the scenes! What does it look like? And what gowns are you going to wear? When is your first appearance, and do you suppose you can get seats for mother and me?"

"One question at a time, pet," was Barbara's answer. And as she looked down at the golden head resting against her shoulder, she realized that there was a peril in the "atmosphere" of her new career which not even her mother had yet brought to the front.

VII.

THE FIRST SETBACK.

BARBARA was made to tell her experience at Froley's to the minutest detail. When she spoke of the accident to Miss Appleton, Freda exclaimed :

"Oh, I know about that ! I read of it in one of the papers you had this morning. Here, I'll find it for you."

"I wish you would. I hadn't the least idea in the world what Mr. Froley was talking about, but didn't think it necessary to tell him so."

"Here it is. Listen !" And Freda read aloud the following item :

"Amy Appleton, a chorus girl from Froley's, met with quite a serious accident on the Boulevard yesterday afternoon. While on her bicycle she was run into by a brewery wagon, thrown to the pavement, and her leg was broken in two places. The driver was placed under arrest. Miss Appleton was to have had a small part in Mr. Froley's next production, 'The Summer Girl.'"

"So that's the reason Mr. Froley consented to see me," said Barbara.

"And maybe he'll give you the small part in the next play," exclaimed Freda eagerly.

"You'll have to take a stage name. Now, what shall it be?"

"There's time enough to think of that. Perhaps this Appleton girl will be well before they put the new piece on. Besides, it isn't likely Mr. Froley would give her part to me, any way. He just wants me for the chorus."

"A chorus girl!" groaned Mrs. Van Dyke. "If your poor father should know of this!"

Fearful lest the old discussion would be reopened, Barbara pleaded utter weariness and went to bed.

The next day was rainy, and the lowering skies seemed a fitting accompaniment to Barbara's mood. A reaction from the excitement that possessed her yesterday had set in.

She had forgotten the name of the stage manager she was to ask for, and told Freda that it was very likely a dozen other girls had been promised the place, which only one of them could get. But soon after ten she went off under the poorest umbrella in the family's possession.

"Some one of those creatures will probably steal it," her mother declared, "so we might as well see to it that she gets the worst of the bargain."

Arrived at the stage entrance, Barbara found the way barred by a Cerberus of fierce aspect, who demanded to know whom she wanted to see.

"The stage manager," she said meekly. "He expects me."

"He does, eh? It is quare, thin, ye can't call his name."

"Mr. Reynolds told me, but I've forgotten it."

"Oh, if it's Mr. Reynolds ye know, I guess it's all right. Go along in wid yez!"

So Barbara groped her way along the narrow passage, relieved that one obstacle had been overcome. But she soon ran against another. There seemed to be a perfect tangle of passageways, and there was nothing to show which one led to the stage.

There was no one about, nor did she hear any sounds which might guide her. She tried one passage, but this led straight to a door she was afraid to open, and there was no response to her knock.

"I must be too early," she finally decided, and started to return to the outer entrance.

Then she discovered that she had lost her way, so she was constrained to stand still and wait for somebody to come. Presently she heard voices, and hurrying towards them, was confronted by two girls in waterproofs. The face of one was a muddy white, and that of the other covered with faint freckles. Both were chewing gum.

"Excuse me," began Barbara, "but will you please show me the way to the stage?"

At first her only reply was a concentrated stare, and then the pale one said, "Follow us. We're going that way."

"Are you the new girl in Amy's place?" asked the other, turning suddenly.

"Yes, that is, I was told to report at rehearsal today."

"Is the governor going to give you her part in the new piece?" This very sharply.

"I don't know anything about it. I don't even know what I'm to do in this one."

"I can tell you that much," said she of the freckles. "You're to be a page along with Sadie Fyles. And if you've got a voice she won't do a thing but make it warm for you. But here we are."

Barbara had been so interested in the conversation that she had paid no attention to the route by which they had come. She now found herself in the wings of the stage.

The latter was quite bare of scenery, except for a pile of it stacked against the rear wall. An upright piano stood out by the footlights near one of the boxes, and the auditorium looked ghastly with its seats draped in white cloths to shield them from the dust.

There was no one about but Barbara and the two girls who had showed her the way. They stood apart and talked in whispers by themselves

for a while ; then she of the freckles beckoned to Barbara.

"You're new at the business, aren't you?" she asked.

"Yes," Barbara admitted with some reluctance.

Somehow she felt just as the freshman at college must during the first day of the term.

"How did you get on?" pursued her questioner. "Did you have a pull?"

"I simply went to Mr. Froley yesterday, as a perfect stranger. He heard me sing, and then told me to come this morning. He really hasn't engaged me yet."

"Sh! Here he comes now!" exclaimed the pale faced girl, and instantly both dropped their eyes to the stage and looked the personification of meekness.

Mr. Froley was accompanied by a tall young man, smooth faced and rather good looking. As soon as the manager caught sight of Barbara he beckoned her over to him.

"This is Miss Van Dyke, the girl I was telling you about, Mr. Deering," he said, for all the world as though she were a bale of goods, as it seemed to Barbara.

Mr. Deering favored her with a short little nod and an extremely long stare.

"She'll certainly look the part," he said then,

turning to Mr. Froley. "Fortunately, it won't require much acting. She's to take 13's place now, I suppose?"

"Yes. You'll have to give her a rehearsal this morning. Better see Mrs. Watts about the suit at once."

"Come with me, if you please;" and the stage manager touched Barbara lightly on the arm.

He ran up a winding iron stairway at such speed that she had much ado to keep up with him. Their destination was a little room, filled with garments of every description, in the midst of which an old woman sat sewing.

"Did Billy bring 13's suit here, Mrs. Watts?" inquired the stage manager.

"Yes, here it is."

"Good, here's the young lady to wear it. I dare say she'll fill it out better than 16 did last night. She looked a fright."

"Well, sir, you know we didn't get word about Miss Appleton till almost the last minute, and then Mr. Froley told me she wasn't going to be permanent."

But the busy stage manager was already beyond earshot, leaving Barbara alone with the wardrobe mistress.

"Now, miss—what's your name?" began the old lady.

"Van Dyke."

"My, you're quite an aristocrat, or perhaps that's your stage name."

"It's my own. I don't suppose I need a stage name in the chorus. Did I understand they are all numbered, and that my number is 13?"

"Yes; but you ain't superstitious, I hope. Why, I know of a young miss who began as No. 13 and in less than six months she was a leading lady."

"And I believe Miss Appleton was No. 13," added Barbara, "and now she's laid up with a broken limb. But I'll take my chances."

"That's the way to talk; but deary me, you mustn't talk so much here without working. Quick! Off with your dress and petticoats. You must put on these pants."

Barbara recoiled a step in horror, gazing at the pair of blue velvet knickerbockers Mrs. Watts held out towards her.

"Have I got to wear those?" she exclaimed.

"Of course you have. Did you suppose a page wore dresses?"

"But I never can. I didn't suppose——" and even though there was no one about but the old lady, Barbara blushed a fiery red.

"Stuff and nonsense! The idea of a chorus girl stopping at a thing like that! And I'll tell

you one thing : you'll fill 'em out a sight better than Sadie Fyles does hers. Come, put them on at once till I see what alterations are needed."

But Barbara's mouth now made a firm, straight line.

"No," she said, "I will not do it ! It is bad enough to go on the stage, without dressing in such a way as will make me ashamed to have my mother and sister come to see me. How can I get to Mr. Deering?" and she turned to the door.

"You're a fool !" cried the old woman, who foresaw a scolding in store for herself. "Why didn't you make all this fuss before?"

"Because I didn't know. I'm very sorry, but I must see Mr. Deering or Mr. Froley at once ;" and escaping from Mrs. Watt's detaining hand, Barbara hurried down the spiral stairway to the stage.

This was now crowded with people. She could see both Mr. Froley and Mr. Deering talking to several persons at once, and realized that she could not have chosen a more inopportune time to make her complaint.

VIII.

THE FIRST REHEARSAL.

BARBARA had been afraid of but few people in her life, but she *was* afraid of Mr. Froley. Her heart sank when, as she reached the stage, he happened to step directly in front of her, where he remained for the moment, gazing at a back drop which had just been lowered for his inspection.

Now that the time had arrived, she would so much rather have had her complaint reach the manager via Mr. Deering. But the latter was hemmed in by a bevy of chorus girls, to whom he was giving directions.

Barbara was summoning up her courage to speak when Mr. Froley called out "All right," turned suddenly, and confronted her. His quick eye ran up and down her figure in a trice.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "Where is your costume?"

"That is what I came to speak to you about, Mr. Froley," Barbara faltered. "I did not understand that I was expected to wear trousers."

"Put them on at once, and be thankful they

are not tights," the manager snapped out, and at once walked off to join two gentlemen who had just made their appearance on the opposite side of the stage.

Mechanically Barbara turned and began to ascend again the spiral stairway. At any rate, this was the quickest way to escape the curious gazes that were turned on her.

"Tights! She had never even thought of them. Yes, trousers were as nothing compared to these. Mr. Froley was right there. Besides, if she had been going to make a fuss, she should have made it before she had been taken to the wardrobe mistress. That chorus girl had said she was to be a page. It was her own stupidity that had kept her from realizing at once that such a character must require masculine attire.

"I'll ask Mrs. Watts if she knows what that Amy Appleton would have to wear in 'The Summer Girl,' and let that decide it," she resolved.

"Well, Miss Particular, back again, are ye!" exclaimed that lady, her mouth full of pins. "I'll warrant ye got small satisfaction for your pains."

"Tell me one thing, Mrs. Watts," said Barbara, ignoring the slur. "Do you know what sort of a part 13 has in the next piece? I mean how will she have to dress?"

The wardrobe mistress looked at her for an instant, then, in a slightly more conciliatory tone, she replied :

“ From all I hear, very much as you dressed yourself last summer.”

“ All right, give me the trousers ;” and inside of ten minutes one of the prettiest pages that old mirror had ever seen looked back at her from the glass.

“ Beautiful !” exclaimed Mrs. Watts, standing off to admire the fit. “ Poor Amy wasn’t a marker to you in it.”

Barbara was about to ask whether she couldn’t take them off now, when there was a short knock at the door, and it opened to admit Mr. Deering. Barbara turned as red as the plume in her cap as she noted his glance of undisguised admiration.

“ Good !” he exclaimed. “ Now, Miss Van Dyke, if you will come with me, we will have a little rehearsal for tonight’s performance.”

“ Do I appear tonight ?” exclaimed Barbara, horrified.

“ Certainly. No. 16 was only a makeshift last evening, and a pretty poor one at that.”

“ But I don’t know a word of my part.”

“ For the excellent reason,” laughed the stage manager, “ that there are none to learn. You and Sadie Fyles simply come on with Miss

Harley, who plays the *Queen*. Here she is now. Miss Fyles, this is Miss Van Dyke, who will take Amy's place. Coach her as best you can till I can clear the stage to give her a rehearsal."

"For which play, Mr. Deering?" and the girl drew herself up stiffly.

"For tonight, of course. Don't be a fool, Sadie;" and with these words Mr. Deering darted off.

Sadie Fyles was not a prepossessing looking young lady in the garish light of the daytime theater, and her face now wore an expression of discontent that did not lessen its homeliness. But for the moment Barbara was conscious of nothing but those trousers. The stage was crowded with women in everyday dress, and here she was in the midst of them rigged out like a boy.

She tried to reason with herself that they were all so accustomed to this sort of thing that she would not be noticed, but at that very instant she felt a sharp pain near her knee. Turning quickly, she caught sight of the two girls who had showed her the way to the stage. They were hurrying through the crowd, and Barbara was confident that it was to one of them she was indebted for the pin stab.

Deciding that they were beneath her attention, Barbara tried to forget her costume and turned to her companion.

"I am afraid you will have to tell me a good deal," she said. "I've never even seen the play."

"Have you ever been on the stage before?"

"No, nor that."

"There isn't much to do. We only have to appear twice—in the second and fourth acts. Just watch me and do exactly as I do."

"But if I do that I'll be half a second behind you all the time," objected Barbara.

"Well, didn't Mr. Deering say he was going to give you a rehearsal now?"

Barbara realized that my lady was cantankerous for some reason, and said no more. The next minute Mr. Deering came toward them.

"Now, girls," he cried, "we'll have the page act. You, Dolly, take Miss Harley's place, will you?" he added to a girl just behind Barbara, whereat there was a snicker from the others.

"Dolph," he called out to a long haired man who had been chatting with Mr. Froley, "give us the second act march. Now, girls, be ready. Miss Van Dyke, watch Sadie here, and do exactly as she does. Ready? Let her go, Dolph."

The piano struck up and Sadie started off, Barbara alongside of her and feeling like the biggest fool on earth. Everybody was watching her, including Mr. Froley himself, and all crowded into the wings to give room for the grand sweep of this mock pageant.

Out toward the row of footlights they went, then back "up center," as Mr. Deering expressed it, with "Dolly" following on behind as the *Queen* in overshoes and waterproof, to an accompaniment of titters. On arriving at a chair that had been placed at the back, Sadie Fyles started toward the right with never a word of caution to Barbara, who kept straight on with her and was bumped into by Dolly Danvers, who was making for the "throne."

"Stupid!" cried Mr. Deering, rushing up, while a stern "Silence!" from Mr. Froleystifled the giggles that rose on every hand.

"Why didn't you turn to the left and make way for the *Queen*?" the stage manager demanded of Barbara.

"I didn't know——" Barbara began, when Mr. Deering broke in with:

"Didn't Sadie tell you all about it?"

Barbara wanted to say that Sadie had told her practically nothing, but deciding that this would get the girl down on her worse than ever, held her peace.

The march was tried over again, and this time went all right, and Barbara was complimented by Mr. Deering on her aptness. Then the entrance for the fourth act was tried, and as this was somewhat more elaborate, it had to be gone over half a dozen times, to Sadie Fyles' ill concealed

disgust. It was plain that she had no love for the newcomer, and when Barbara found that she was expected to share the dressing room with her and No. 16, her heart sank.

By the time the rehearsal was over and the contract signed it was past three o'clock, and Barbara was faint from want of food. She hurried home, feeling as if she never wanted to hear the word "theater" again, and yet she must report at Frole's again by half past seven, or be fined for tardiness.

"It's as bad as going back to school," she told herself.

When she informed the family that she was to appear that very night, Freda was wild to go. But Barbara would not listen to it.

"Perhaps," she told herself, "the new piece will be put on soon, and they need never know about the page's suit."

"I can't ask for tickets yet," she explained, "and we can't spare the money now. Wait till I have a regular part. Then you must come and clap for me."

"But what do you do now?" Freda wanted to know. "You haven't told us yet."

"Oh, I'm only in the chorus, you know. I simply walk on and off again."

"I'll come for you after it is over," said Mrs. Van Dyke.

"You will do nothing of the sort, mother. I shouldn't have a moment's peace if I thought you were waiting for me."

"If you only had a brother, my dear," sighed the poor mother.

"If I had I probably shouldn't be obliged to go on the stage, so while you're wishing you might as well wish that we'd never lost our money, that father was well, and that things generally were not as they are."

"What is your stage name to be, Barbara?" asked Freda.

"I forgot all about that, but I've just thought of a splendid one—Violet Brandon. It doesn't sound as if it suited me, and that's why I like it."

IX.

THE FIRST NIGHT.

WHEN Barbara reached the theater that night she had almost as much trouble to find her dressing room as she had to discover the way to the stage that morning.

She was early, of course. Her nervousness would not permit her to wait for time. The making up of her face caused her no concern. Her experience in amateur theatricals had rendered her quite an adept in this. She was dressed and ready to go on by the time Sadie Fyles and the other occupant of the room arrived.

They vouchsafed her scarcely a nod, and continued their private conversation, which seemed to concern itself principally with "fellows." Barbara squeezed herself into a far corner, so as to be out of the way as much as possible, and tried not to overhear. But presently her attention was arrested in spite of herself.

"Billy's beginning to be a gone case on that unlucky number already," remarked Sadie Fyles, as she worked away at her face with the hare's foot.

"I suppose it's her airs," replied the other. "They're a novelty in this atmosphere, you know."

"She's a born aristocrat—I don't think," retorted the spiteful Sadie. "But we'll show her a thing or two here."

Barbara felt her cheeks glowing hot through the grease paint. She was certain they were talking about her, perhaps ignorant of the fact that she knew her number, or, it may be, quite indifferent as to whether she did or not.

But who "Billy" was she could not determine. The whole subject was nauseating to her refined sense of the fitness of things, and she suffered as she had never expected to suffer and be silent.

"If I had only brought a book or a bit of embroidery," she sighed; "something to keep me busy during this terrible imprisonment with these creatures!"

She heard faintly the strains of the orchestra and knew that they were only at the overture. It would be an hour, at least, before it came her turn to go on. Heaven knew, she dreaded this enough, but anything was better than her present environment.

Presently there was a knock on the door, and then Mr. Deering's voice:

"Miss Van Dyke, can I see you a moment?"

"Ah, I thought Billy couldn't wait!" murmured Sadie Fyles under her breath, but Barbara just caught the words as she passed behind her.

So "Billy" was the stage manager, and he was supposed to have shown a preference for her already! It was insufferable, such petty gossip; still, Barbara knew enough of the stage to realize that she must expect it. But Mr. Deering calling for her in this way would only make matters worse.

"You are all ready to go on, I see," he said, when she had reached the door.

"Yes, sir," she replied, conscious that the two girls behind her were eagerly drinking in every word.

"And you have never seen the play from the front?" he went on.

"Not your production of it," she answered.

"Come with me, then. It will give you a little idea of your own work to witness what leads up to it. This way; be careful of the steps."

He put out his hand to lead her through a dark passage behind a stack of scenery. She just gave him the tips of her fingers. They were cold as ice.

"You are frightened," he said. "Come, that won't do. Everything is all right. You did beautifully at rehearsal."

These few kind words were like balm to Barbara for the moment, then she recollected from whom they came, and what those girls in the dressing room had said, what they must be saying now. She drew her hand away quickly, and this time her tone, as well as her fingers, was frigid.

"It isn't stage fright," she said. "Don't worry lest I disgrace the theater. I have undertaken this work simply from a business point of view, and I mean to go through with it to the best of my ability."

Just then they emerged into the glare of a bunch light standing in the wings, and Barbara noted that her companion was in full court costume of Louis XV period, in which he looked exceedingly handsome.

"I must go on now," he whispered to her. "Stand right here and you will be safe."

He left her in a nook in the wings on the prompt side, from which she could obtain a measurably good view of the action. Then he strode on the stage with a speech directed at Miss Harley, the great star of the theater.

The play was one of the old standards, and as Barbara watched its progress from her unwonted point of vantage, she recalled the other circumstances under which she had last seen it. It was in a big theater party she had given. They

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had taken twenty seats and afterwards there was supper at Sherry's and a dance. That was two years ago—only two years! She wondered if any of the party were in the house tonight and would recognize her as the page—in a boy's suit! She had quite forgotten that in her other worriments. Now the consciousness of it caused her a sudden sinking of the knees.

Then another thought struck her. What if Allan Thurwell were in front! She remembered his asking her to be sure to let him know when she played *Juliet*. Here she was only the next day—that meeting in the insurance office seemed ages back—appearing as one of the least important members in the Froley chorus!

It was all like a dream—a nightmare rather. Barbara thought of the charm the stage has for so many girls. Then she looked about her at the calm, businesslike way in which everything was conducted, remembered the long, dreary waits between appearances, and the crowding of the dressing rooms, the gossip, the scandal, aye, and perhaps worse, she might yet be called upon to pass through; and now, before her first evening of it was really begun, she felt that if she had ever had any of those illusions, they were already dissipated.

The curtain fell on the first act, and Mr. Deering at once joined her to hurry her out of the

way of the scene shifters. He led her to the extreme rear of the stage, and during the entr'acte gave her detailed directions as to her work in the opening scene.

Barbara was grateful, yet fearful, too, and when she suddenly saw Sadie Fyles, eyes fixed upon her she wished that a trap would open and hide her from that malignant gaze. But now the band struck up the opening chords of the march the piano had played that morning. Mr. Deering conducted her to her place beside Sadie and directly in front of Miss Harley, who appeared to see none of them, and was busy only with the set of her queen's gown, to which her maid was putting a few extra finishing touches. Mr. Deering pressed a button which sent a green fluid dancing into a glass bulb, and then the curtain went up.

Barbara had no time to ask herself whether she was frightened or not before she was on the stage. There was the sea of faces, no one distinguishable from the other, and the applause which she knew was for Miss Harley just behind her, but which somehow gave Barbara confidence. Then the march was over, she and Sadie Fyles were standing one on either side the throne, and the action of the piece went on.

Eight minutes was the time allotted to the scene. Barbara wished it might be forty eight,

not because she was enamored of the glitter of the footlights, but because for the first time that evening she felt safe. She had nothing to do but remain perfectly quiet. The responsibility of action rested with others.

No gossip of the dressing room could annoy her here, nor could Mr. Deering's kindness cause her discomfort that was almost as bad. She was really sorry when the cue came for the exit and she was once more left with her own battles to fight.

Mr. Deering was still on the stage, and as he was the only one who could sanction loitering in the wings, she was compelled to return to that dreaded dressing room. On the way she felt a touch on the shoulder and turned to see Dolly Danvers behind her.

"You did that splendidly," she whispered.

"Thank you," Barbara replied, grateful for this comforting word from one of her own sex. "If the stage were the only part of the theater world behind its scenes there would not be nearly so much misery there."

"That is true, and I'm really sorry for you," was the reply, as the two parted to go their several ways.

Sadie and 16 were already in the room, and the gridiron was smoking hot on which to roast her when Barbara arrived.

"I never saw such shameless favoritism in my life," Sadie was saying.

"I should think he'd have the grace to wait a few days before making such a dead set for her," returned No. 16.

"You'd better be careful, Tot. No knowing what minute he may appear at the door these times."

"Thirteen won't be an unlucky number in this company after this, will it?"

Barbara couldn't stand another minute of it. Regardless of what penalty she might incur, she hurried outside and began to pace up and down the little corridor that ran past the row of dressing rooms.

X.

THE PART PLAYED BY RED PAINT.

FROM the various rooms along the hallway Barbara could hear chattering voices and gay laughter, and once, when she passed her own door, she encountered Sadie Fyles' head, thrust out to see what had become of her.

It was impossible for her not to overhear her report to No. 16 :

" Hopes she may meet Billy out there."

This drove Barbara straight back to close quarters with the enemy, where she passed the rest of the evening, when not on the stage, in a state almost bordering on nervous prostration.

Her work was over at half past ten, and she was then free to go home. She was notified, however, by Mr. Deering that she must report in the morning for rehearsal.

She simply bowed her head in response to these directions and went away without replying to his " Good night, Miss Van Dyke."

" I think I shall never go back there again," she said to herself, as she hurried away from the brightly lighted Tenderloin towards the contrast-

ing darkness of the west side. "If I make up my mind to be indifferent to those gibes, I shall soon be as hardened as they are. The fifteen dollars is very tempting, but peace of mind, thank you, is better."

She determined to say nothing at home of her determination until the morrow. Then she would wait for the Sunday papers, and perhaps, among the larger number of advertisements they would contain, there would be something for her.

Her disgust over the past and anxiety about the future quite crowded out of her mind fear of the present. She had brought a veil, and with this pinned closely over her face she hurried through the night, looking neither to the right nor the left, and beyond the half incoherent remarks of one or two tipsy revelers she was too self absorbed to hear, reached home without misadventure.

Freda had announced that she would not go to bed until her sister's return, so eager was she to hear a report of the "first night." Barbara found her asleep over a book, and to satisfy her told her that she had had not a particle of stage fright, and that everything in front of the foot-lights had gone off beautifully.

"I'm very tired now, pet," she added. "Wait till morning for the rest."

Freda was so sleepy herself that it required but little persuasion to send her to bed. Barbara was soon there, too, but slumber was not yet to visit her eyes. Over and over again the events of the evening passed in mental review before her. She wondered how she had endured it all without a word.

But the past was not all she had to worry about. There was the future. If she left Froley's, the problem of existence had to be fought all over again. There was the firm, to be sure, to which she had written about wrapper directing. Perhaps the morning mail would bring her the chance of an opening with them. At any rate, she was trying to soothe herself into much needed slumber by this reflection when there came a hasty knock at the door, and the dread cry, "Fire!"

Barbara sprang up on the instant, with the one thought that they were on the top floor. She slipped on an old gown and hurried out to make an inspection.

There was no sign of smoke in the hallway, only a group of frightened figures in white in the doorway of the opposite flat.

"It may be a false alarm," mused Barbara, "but I had better get the others up to be on the safe side."

Her mother was already awake, nervously de-

manding what was the matter. Barbara tried to reassure her, at the same time suggesting that it would be wise to get together the silver and their most valuable pieces of jewelry. Then she roused Freda, and while telling her to dress as quickly as she could, there came the sound of fire engines in the street.

"There's no immediate danger, pet," she said soothingly, fearful lest her sister would swoon from fright. Then, looking down at the dress she had on, she added in the impetuous way that was characteristic of her: "Well, if there is any chance that I can save only the gown on my back, it might as well be my best one;" and she changed garments at once.

There was still no sign of smoke in the hallway, and presently Barbara declared she was going on the roof to investigate for herself. The scuttle was close at hand, and, bidding the family remain where they were till she returned, she hastily mounted to the housetop.

There she saw that the only conflagration was from the chimney of a bakery next door. The firemen had already subdued the flames, and all danger was over. Barbara hurried back.

"It's all right," she cried out. "You can go back to bed. We've had all our trouble for nothing."

"Why, Barbara, you talk as if you were dis-

appointed we weren't burnt out of house and home," remonstrated her mother.

"And look at your dress, sister," added Freda, who had lighted the gas. "What are those streaks down the front breadth?"

Barbara gave one glance and then dropped into a chair with a groan of dismay.

"It's paint—red paint!" she gasped. "I must have got it from the railing on the roof I was leaning against. They've given it a fresh coat."

"Oh, Barbara, and it's your best gown!" lamented Freda.

"Yes, and I took all the trouble of changing an old one for it, and this is the result."

"Perhaps we can get it out if we set to work at once," suggested Mrs. Van Dyke, and what with scrubbing and fussing, all to little purpose, too, the hours slipped away, and it was almost three o'clock before the family got to bed again.

Although the fire had no further serious result than to ruin Barbara's best gown, this incident was sufficient to cause her to reconsider her determination to give up at Froley's.

"I'll need money worse than ever now," she told herself; "and, after all, the beginnings of anything are always unpleasant. I may as well try it a little longer."

So it came to pass that the streaking of a best

dress with red paint was the means of inducing the new chorus girl at Froley's to remain at her post.

The morning mail *did* bring her a reply from the house that had advertised for a wrapper writer. She was requested to call at a down town address that morning.

"I can't possibly go," she declared. "I must be at the theater for rehearsal at eleven."

"Let me go in your place," pleaded Freda.

"But it was my handwriting they saw," objected Barbara. "Besides, we don't want you mixing up with a crowd of people like that."

"Well, any way, I can go down and explain why you can't come;" and Freda made herself ready to be off at once.

When Barbara reached the stage door, the man there told her that Mr. Froley wished to see her in his office. After receiving directions how to find it, she hurried off, wondering if, now that she had determined to stay, the manager had decided to ask her to go. She found him busy writing, as before, but this time he looked up at once.

"Miss Van Dyke," he began, "I have decided to give you a small part in my next production, 'The Summer Girl.' You will have two songs to sing and something to speak. The part is worth twenty five dollars a week, and if you

give satisfaction I will retain you in the character throughout the run of the piece, which is underlined for production a week from Monday."

He handed her a roll of typewritten copy and dismissed her by saying that she could obtain further instructions from Mr. Deering on the stage. Barbara wanted to ask if this meant that she need no longer share dressing rooms with Sadie Fyles and No. 16, but wisely decided not to bother Mr. Froley with such matters. She descended to the stage, which was fast filling up with members of the company.

"Good morning, Miss Van Dyke," said the stage manager, advancing to meet her with outstretched hand. "The governor has told you the good news. I see it by your face."

"The best part of it will be an item that perhaps Mr. Froley never gave a thought to," she replied, on the impulse of the moment.

"And what is that?"—eagerly.

"That I may have a dressing room to myself, or at least with some others than those with whom I am now thrust."

"Oh, so jealousy is at work so soon!" muttered Mr. Deering. "Tell me, Miss Van Dyke, have those girls annoyed you beyond all sufferance?"

"They have not been the pleasantest companions," replied Barbara frankly.

She knew her cheeks were flaming at Mr. Deering's mention of "jealousy." Could it be that he was aware of what Sadie Fyles had said about himself, and that he dared thus openly refer to it? But his next words set her mind at rest on this point.

"I was afraid they would see that you were better adapted to take Amy's place in the next piece than either of them. Now that they know the worst, perhaps they will reconcile themselves to it. At any rate, I will see if I cannot have you assigned elsewhere at once."

XI.

THE NEW RÔLE.

"I SUPPOSE it is only a case of out of the frying pan into the fire," mused Barbara, when she was presently informed that she could hereafter dress with Dolly Danvers and another of the chorus girls. "Those others will only be convinced that the transfer is simply a fresh evidence of favoritism."

But, at any rate, she would be free from constant discomfort. Her lines and songs for the new part were in the roll Mr. Froley had given her. A hasty glance through it showed her that the character was that of a high bred millionaire's daughter to whom teas, dances, theater parties, and the proper thing in society were matters of serious import. The closing speeches told of her pairing off with *Gordon Calvert*, and Barbara was a little concerned as to who he might be, inasmuch as at one point she noticed she was to throw herself into his arms.

All the others knew their parts fairly well. Mr. Deering told her she could read hers for this occasion, and study it later. As she knew

nothing of the nature of the play, she was obliged to watch the rehearsing closely while waiting for her cue. She made up her mind to forget her surroundings and do her very best, and as she was naturally a good reader she made an excellent impression by her promptness in entrance and the vigor with which she delivered her opening speech. She was even more successful in throwing the necessary haughtiness into *Gladys Berringford's* character. The songs she was to go over with the musical director that afternoon.

Barbara experienced mingled feelings when she discovered that *Gordon Calvert* was impersonated by Mr. Deering. She was glad, on the one hand, that she was not to be thrown with a perfect stranger, and somewhat suspicious, on the other, that there may have been some special contriving on the stage manager's part to bring this about. But he was very gentlemanly. Still, this was not wholly reassuring. Sometimes she was almost inclined to wish he would talk as roughly to her as he did to some of the other girls when they made mistakes.

"The Summer Girl" was a rollicking musical comedy, with pretty songs and some droll situations. Barbara's part was one the points of which she thoroughly appreciated, and consequently she did not realize she was fatigued when

she was dismissed to the care of the director of the orchestra at three o'clock. She had more trouble with the songs, being quite unaccustomed to act and sing at the same time. It was quite an hour before Mr. Sommers was satisfied with that day's work.

So it was half past four when she reached home, worn out, too tired to eat, and yet conscious that she must take something to give her strength to study her lines and to go through her evening's work. She had just time to listen to Freda's joyous announcement that she had obtained the "job" at the wrapper addressing place, and then shut herself in her room with her part.

"You are wearing yourself out, child," said her mother, when she came out again at half past six to go through the form of eating her supper.

"It will only be for a little while, though," she replied. "And think of the twenty five dollars a week I am to get!"

But Mrs. Van Dyke only shook her head sadly. She could think of nothing but the disgrace of one of their name being on the stage. Barbara hurried off to the theater, and found the girl who shared the room with Dolly Danvers to be a Miss Rice, rather a timid little creature, and of considerable refinement. Dolly had not yet arrived, *so the two were left to introduce themselves.*

"You've just come, haven't you?" said Miss Rice. "Did you have any trouble in getting taken on?"

"No; I just chanced to apply when there was a vacancy;" and Barbara told of her first interview with Mr. Froley.

"You were fortunate. I tried again and again. He was either out or busy, or there was nobody needed just then. Oh, it's a wearying task, and I almost despaired of ever getting an opening."

"Yes, I knew it was only a coincidence my happening to come just the day after that Miss Appleton was laid up, because I knew nothing about it till afterwards."

At this point Dolly Danvers arrived, and contributed her experience to the symposium on the difficulty of getting on the stage.

"I had a letter to Mr. Froley from a friend of his. I sent this, asking for an appointment, which he gave me right away. But he said there were no vacancies in the company then, and he put me on the waiting list. I stayed there for almost a year and a half."

"My, but you're in luck again, getting a part so quickly," added Miss Rice, turning once more to Barbara. "Why, you haven't even been an understudy?"

"That's because of her looks and aristocratic bearing," promptly explained Dolly. "Oh,

you needn't blush, my dear. That sort of thing here is our stock in trade, you know."

"Yes, I'm sure you're going to make a hit in the part, Miss Van Dyke," added Miss Rice.

"You'll do ten times better than ever Amy Appleton would. She hasn't the refinement, though she may have the looks and figure. You, Ricey, have the refinement, but alas, not the inches. Oh, Froley struck luck, Miss Van Dyke, when you fell into his lap, like a ripe plum from a tree under which he had been sleeping!"

"What have you got in the new piece?" asked Barbara. "I didn't notice."

"I don't wonder. I'm only in the chorus, along with Ricey here. Ta, ta, there's our call now."

The evening was a much more satisfactory one to Barbara than the previous one had been, although she was fearfully tired, and moreover fully conscious that she was the object of malignant glances from Sadie Fyles and her set.

One incident in particular disturbed her serenity. The whole company were on the stage at the fall of the curtain on the fourth act. It was raised once in response to applause, Barbara and Sadie Fyles remaining like statues on either side of the *Queen*. As it touched the boards for the last time, Mr. Deering rose from his kneel-

ing position in front of Miss Harley and turned to Barbara.

"Oh, Miss Van Dyke," he said, "I forgot to ask you whether I am to use your own name in giving out the cast to the printer."

"No; I have decided to take Violet Brandon," replied Barbara, and as she spoke she noticed that Miss Harley bestowed upon her anything but a friendly look.

"So there are jealousies in every grade," she said to herself. "I wish I could tell her how little cause she has to fear me if she likes Mr. Deering, but I suppose that would hardly be the thing to do."

The next day was Saturday and there was a *matinée*. Barbara was pretty well worn out with the strain of it all by eleven o'clock at night, and rejoiced that Sunday was at hand. But she got up in time to go to church with Freda.

They no longer attended where they had been wont to worship when they lived on Madison Avenue, but the little congregation they had sought out had lately grown to a large one, with several of the fashionable folk among its members. On this morning Barbara suddenly became conscious during the sermon that some one was looking at her.

Turning her head slightly she saw a tall young man in one of the facing side pews with his eyes

fixed steadily on her. He dropped them immediately when he noted that he was observed, but Barbara did not immediately transfer her gaze back to the pulpit. There was something familiar in the figure, and yet she was certain she had never met the man.

Then of a sudden it all came over her. He had sat in a box the night before at Froley's, and as she wheeled in the grand march their eyes had chanced to meet for an instant. He reminded her faintly of Allan Thurwell, and for a second she had feared it might be he.

Now she knew he had recognized her as the page in the chorus, and she felt as though she could not remain there in his full view another moment. But she fought the weakness and conquered, and for the remainder of the service tried to remain oblivious to his presence.

The incident, however, did not soon pass from her mind. It forcibly impressed upon her the fact that a stage name would not prevent her being recognized unless she had a character part to play.

"But I am not ashamed of my work," she told herself. "Why should I mind?"

She knew the one thing she feared, but would not admit it even to herself.

XII.

THE HIT.

THE next week was an exceedingly busy one with Barbara. Every morning there was the rehearsal, at night came the regular performance of the old play, and on Wednesday and Saturday matinées. And there were visits to the dressmaker's in between. She wore two fetching costumes, and on Saturday night handed over the page suit to Mrs. Watts without a pang at the parting. Sunday evening there was a dress rehearsal. Barbara was inclined to rebel at this, and frankly told Mr. Deering that she did not like the idea of it at all.

"All in this business have not the same high standards as yourself, Miss Van Dyke," he said. "It is a pity that they have not."

Barbara said no more, and wished she had not spoken. The stage manager's attentions had grown more decided with the constant association called for by their parts in the new piece. Dolly Danvers one day broached the subject with the frankness that seemed to be the order of the day in this world behind the scenes.

"Billy is very nice to you, isn't he, Miss Van?" she said.

Everybody appeared to call everybody else by his or her first name, Barbara had long since noticed. Dolly, not knowing hers, had compromised on "Miss Van."

The remark was made in such a different spirit from that which pervaded the innuendos of Sadie Fyles, that Barbara could not take offense.

"It's his business to help newcomers along, isn't it?" she replied.

"I notice he didn't seem to think so when I arrived," retorted Dolly. "Miss Harley is dreadfully jealous. It's a good job she is going on the road when we produce 'The Summer Girl' or your eyes might not remain in your head."

"Well, I'm sure I'm not interested in Mr. Deering a little bit, outside of the work I have to do, so Miss Harley need not worry."

Barbara tried to speak with entire unconcern. She certainly meant every word she said; but the very idea of talking on such a matter was so foreign to all her notions of propriety that, to her vexation, she felt her cheeks growing warm.

"Do you know what some of the girls here call you, Miss Van?" Dolly burst out, after a pause.

"Nothing particularly complimentary, I'll venture."

"That depends on how you take it. They call you the born aristocrat."

Barbara laughed.

"Oh, yes," she said; "I remember hearing that once in my old dressing room."

Monday was an exciting day. There was no rehearsal, but any quantity of "last things" to be looked after. At night a feeling of intense excitement pervaded the entire building. Mr. Froley went about examining this, criticising that, or objecting to the other, and scolded Mr. Deering so freely that Barbara began to have more of a fellow feeling for the stage manager than she had ever before experienced.

Her entrance was soon after the rise of the curtain on the first act, and she was called to take her place in the wings while the overture was playing. She was standing in the prompt entrance, watching the chorus girls take their places, and thankful that she wasn't one of them on this occasion. Mr. Froley was walking around each group as it formed and making suggestions in stage whispers that were couched in language more forcible than polite.

"Here, you, don't fix your eyes that way. They look crossed.

"Now, then, please drop that frozen smile. It's too conventional.

"You, Miss Bentley, pray release yourself

from that rack of torture on which you appear to be stretched, and look natural."

And so it went on for three or four minutes. Then Mr. Froley came off, and the next instant Barbara heard him talking to Mr. Deering behind the border that stood at her right.

"She may do all right, but it's a tremendous risk," were the first words she caught. "I engaged her, in the first place, on her looks, and her voice is a fairly good one, but she's liable to turn out a perfect stick in acting."

"She hasn't been a stick at rehearsals," objected Mr. Deering.

"No, not with you to make suggestions to her every two minutes. I want you to remember that we had the chance to get Vinnie Trent for the part unexpectedly, and that I decided to let this one keep it on your representations that she might prove a 'find.' If she doesn't, you will know where the blame will lie."

Just here the orchestra came out with a crash of sounds, and Barbara heard nothing more. But she had heard enough to realize that she was the person under discussion. Vinnie Trent, she knew, was a professional actress of some reputation, who would be apt to fit the part for which she herself had been cast. And it was to William Deering's pleadings she owed it that she had been retained !

Barbara set her teeth hard, and beat an impatient little tattoo on the stage with the stick of her sunshade. It was maddening to think she was indebted to him for a thing of this sort. And now, if she succeeded, she would vindicate his judgment, and it would be but natural that he should think more highly of her than ever.

If she failed? Well, there would be a storm of abuse for him from Mr. Froley, and for herself, too; and as pity is akin to love, she did not see that matters would be in any way improved in this respect, while the loss of the higher pay would make her less independent. No. She would do her best. That was the only honest course. Results must take care of themselves.

The curtain had risen now, and there was a burst of applause for the pretty setting. There was more for the first chorus, which had to be repeated, and so Barbara's entrance was delayed. Mr. Deering came up to her as she waited there, her heart going like mad.

"Put your whole soul into it," he whispered, as he put out his hand to give hers a brief pressure. "You may make the night yours if you will."

"I'm going to try," she replied.

She had caught the full spirit of the occasion now. Her eyes shone like stars from excitement. Deering was a handsome fellow, there

was no denying that. He looked very well in his white outing costume, but Barbara knew of one who had looked better.

"I wonder if he's in the audience tonight," she said to herself as she walked on the stage.

The house—packed to the limits—was perfectly quiet on her entrance. "Violet Brandon" was an unknown quantity to the public. Few, if any, knew that she had been a page the week previous. The next moment there was a laugh. One of her speeches had "caught on," but people were too busy with their opera glasses to applaud.

Then came Barbara's first song. It was encored, but did not please the audience as much as did her repartee in the ensuing scene with Mr. Deering. She left him on the scene, supposedly utterly put to rout, but there was such long continued handclapping that Mr. Froley, who was standing there, pushed her gently and cried, more excited than she had ever seen him :

"Go back, girl, and thank them with a bow."

Which Barbara did, to be greeted with a perfect salvo of applause, while Deering stood looking at her like one entranced.

Barbara had brought a book to read between her appearances, for her two roommates were on the stage much of the time. But she could think of nothing but Mr. Deering's look at her

when she had gone back to take her call. Just before it was time for her to go up again, Dolly burst in with a beaming face. She flew over to Barbara and kissed her.

"I must do it now, my dear," she exclaimed, "for I'll never get another chance. You'll be such a great lady after tonight that you'll scarcely want to notice a poor chorus girl."

"Nonsense," said Barbara. "They've only seen me in one little bit."

"Doesn't matter," insisted Dolly. "You've made a big hit. The critics are sending back to find out who you are."

"Mercy me! I hope Mr. Froley won't give them my real name;" and Barbara looked alarmed.

"No fear of that. He is too fond of nursing a mystery. But there's your call now."

Barbara could not help noticing what a difference those ten minutes on the stage in the new piece had made in her atmosphere. People looked at her with new meaning in their glances now. She was the "hit."

Deering was just leaving the stage as she went on. "Congratulate you," was all he had time to whisper as they passed in the wings, but he caught her hand for an instant in a pressure that was almost painful in its fervor.

She had not so much to do in this scene, but

the audience evidently delighted to gaze upon her, for it paid strict attention to all the episodes in which she had a part. At the fall of the curtain on the first act the principals were called before it, and six of them walked in a line, hand in hand, across before the footlights.

But the public was not yet satisfied, and it would not cease from handclapping until Mr. Deering had led out Barbara, who was conscious only of one thing—the firm pressure of the stage manager's fingers on hers and the shining light of love in his eyes.

XIII.

THE PENALTY OF SUCCESS.

BARBARA was exceedingly uncomfortable for a girl who was making a hit. All the sweetness of success was tinged with dread of its effects on the man who must feel that he had made it possible.

"If he was only less gentlemanly, it would be easier for me," she sighed. "I could then steel my heart to give him the snub direct."

The evening wore on. "The Summer Girl" was proving a great "go," with Violet Brandon leading favorite. Barbara was dreading the "making up" scene with Deering at the very end; but she knew any lack of fervor on her part would throw the whole rôle out of proportion. And she was too great a lover of just weights and balances to do a thing of this sort.

But the stage manager was either too considerate or too astute to take advantage of circumstances. He released her from his arms the instant the descending curtain passed the waist line, and, as doubtless he expected, he was rewarded by a grateful look. When it was all

over, however, and they were leaving the stage for their dressing rooms, he kept by her side, to ask earnestly :

"Won't you do me the honor to go to supper with me tonight, Miss Van Dyke? I know I am asking a great deal, but this is a special occasion, you know."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Deering," she replied, "but that would be entirely against my rules."

He looked disappointed, but not surprised.

"At least, then," he added, "you will permit me to walk home with you."

Barbara felt that the whole thing might as well be settled now, once for all. She stopped and turned to him with an earnest face.

"Mr. Deering," she said, "I am very sorry if what I say may offend you, but I cannot possibly receive any attentions whatsoever from any one in the theater. And—and, may I ask that hereafter you will address me as Miss Brandon? Good night."

She inclined her head slightly, picked up the trail of her gown, and swiftly descended the steps leading to the ladies' dressing rooms. An instant later and the door of her own had closed behind her.

She scarcely heard the gay chatter and congratulations of her companions, so busy was she

wondering what would be the outcome of the "firm stand" she had taken. It seemed almost as if she had stabbed her best friend. If it had not been for Mr. Deering she would not have had the opportunity to make the hit she had just scored. And now he might think she had waited till she felt independent to topple over the scaffolding on which she had climbed.

As this thought occurred to her, she was almost minded to rush out and speak a kind word to him. But she knew this would undo everything.

"He must learn that the theater is business with me wholly and without any reservations," she told herself.

But on her way home she wished that he might have learned this fact in another way than from her own lips.

"If I only had a brother, I'd conceal his name from them at Froley's, and let them think, when he came for me, that he was——"

And then she flushed as the thought of one person occurred to her, the person who made it utterly impossible that she could ever think of William Deering with any sort of sentimentality, even had he been a divinity student without any connection with the theater.

Freda and her mother were both waiting up for her. The advance sale was so large that it

had been impossible to get seats for them for the opening week.

"Well, I made a hit," she announced languidly, before they could ask any questions, and she proceeded to tell about the applause and the curtain calls.

"How perfectly elegant!" exclaimed Freda, and Mrs. Van Dyke looked as if the stage was a shade less black than her fancy had painted it.

But Barbara seemed to have lost all interest in the matter. She was thinking what would be her greeting from Mr. Deering on the morrow.

"I'm sure I shall scarcely sleep a wink for impatience to see what the critics say about you in the morning," were Freda's last words as she put her head on her pillow.

And she could not have slept much, as she was out before six to buy the papers. She wakened Barbara by dropping a bundle of them on the bed.

"Splendid!" cried the enthusiastic girl. "Why, Barbara, you're famous. Or, rather, Violet Brandon is. Listen to this:

"Mr. Froleigh indeed has a 'find' in Miss Brandon. Such beauty and grace are welcome visitors to the contemporary stage, while her acting shows real intelligence to comprehend the meaning of the rôle, and skill to carry it out.

"Three cheers for sister!" and Freda ran with the notice to her mother.

Barbara picked up another paper, which contained the following item :

Who is she ? Why have we never heard of her before ? Such were the questions the audience at Froley's last night were asking themselves as they filed out thinking of Violet Brandon. She wasn't the star of "The Summer Girl"—at least, we are sure that Mr. Froley hadn't meant that she should be—but the fates decreed otherwise, and the manager cannot help himself.

Barbara dropped the sheet, looked around the little box of a room, and felt that she must be reading all this about somebody else.

Freda came flying back.

"Now let's see what Eric Vane says about you," she cried. "I'm almost afraid to look, though. He's so spiteful and viperish at times. No, listen ;" and Freda read out breathlessly :

"I am a captive. The chains that bind me, though, are the willing ones of adoration for a new divinity. Her name is Violet Brandon, and Mr. Froley will have to get a special deputation of police after this to keep a path clear to the stage door. She is beautiful. My adjectives are exhausted before I write one down, so I must use none, and thereby strengthen my assertion.

"Oh, sister, aren't we proud of you !" and Freda flew to the bed to give Barbara a hug before she picked up another paper.

"I'm not proud of that, though," retorted Barbara. "He never says a word about my acting. You might think I was a beauty freak in a dime museum."

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"Hear this, though," broke in Freda, holding up a finger for silence :

"A new comer, Violet Brandon, made a very pleasing impression. But she has one bad mannerism. She moves her hands too much. She should study repose. .

"Oh, isn't he mean, to speak of a little thing like that !" exclaimed the small sister.

"No ; that's the best criticism I've heard yet. It shows that he really observed my acting. That's what I call an intelligent notice ; one from which I can learn something."

The rest were all laudatory, and Freda was so excited she could scarcely tear herself away to go to the office.

"I wish you would give up that wrapper writing, pet," Barbara called from the bedroom, for she did not get up to breakfast. "There's no need, now that my salary has been increased."

"Just a little longer and I will ;" and with a hasty kiss Freda hurried away.

"Mother," Barbara demanded, when they were alone, "what sort of a place is that Freda has? I have been so rushed with rehearsals that I seem to have had no time for home."

"I went down with her one morning, you know," was the reply. "It seems to be a very quiet office, that of a trade paper, I believe."

"Is Freda the only girl?"

"No, there is a stenographer."

"Well, I am worried about her," said Barbara. "Didn't you detect a sort of subdued excitement about her manner just now?"

"Only the excitement over your notices that you ought to have yourself, it seems to me. It is you I am worried about, my dear, rather than Freda."

"Oh, I am all right. Just used up, now that the strain of doing a new thing is removed. But don't you fret about either of us. Leave Freda to me. Now I'm going to try to go to sleep again."

But shortly after nine the bell rang, and when Mrs. Van Dyke opened the door a young man asked if Miss Violet Brandon was in.

"She doesn't live here."

"But I was told at Froley's Theater that she did, and down stairs they said that the actress could be found on this floor."

Mrs. Van Dyke gave a start and began slowly to close the door.

"You cannot see her," she said stiffly. "She is asleep."

"But it is not necessary for me to see her," persisted the man. "I only want to get a photograph of her from which to make a cut for this afternoon's *Telephone*."

"I will not have my daughter's photograph

in the papers. Kindly step out so that I may close the door."

But the man did not budge.

"Excuse me, my dear madam, but the press agent at Froley's sent me here. There is my card, and the *Telephone* is one of the most——"

"She has no pictures, any way," broke in Mrs. Van Dyke, to gain time. "So we could not possibly give you one for today. Good morning."

"We will send a photographer, then," exclaimed the man, and he hurried away, leaving Mrs. Van Dyke to lock and bolt the door, and feel as if she were living in a tower about to be bombarded.

XIV.

A COWARDLY RUSE.

WHEN Barbara woke up about noon, her mother told her of the reporter's visit.

"It's lucky I haven't a picture of myself," she said, with satisfaction. "What good is a stage name to one if her portrait is to be spread broadcast by the papers?"

"I suppose we shall have another fight with the photographer the man promised to send," added Mrs. Van Dyke.

"Leave him to me;" and Barbara spoke with the air of dismissing the matter from her mind till the time came for action.

The next moment, however, the street bell rang.

"Wait, mother," she cried. "I'll answer it with a call down the tube.

"Who's there?"

She repeated this several times, and meantime the bell rang again. Finally the reply came back:

"An artist from the *Telephone*."

"You can't come up, so you might just as well go away at once."

So saying Barbara dropped the tube and paid no further attention to the bell. But within five minutes there was a ring at the door of the flat.

"Somebody else has let him in," said Barbara. "But never mind; he won't get any further."

And she proceeded with her breakfast, giving no heed to the several successive sounds of the door bell. Finally they ceased, and they concluded that their persecutor had gone away in disgust. So he had, but he left a parting shot behind him in the shape of a card thrust under the door.

"The *Telephone* stands very high with Mr. Froley," it read. "We were sent here by the press agent of the theater, and our treatment shall be reported to headquarters."

Mrs. Van Dyke looked worried.

"Do you suppose you will get in trouble, Barbara?" she said anxiously.

"I'm not afraid of them. Don't you see, mom, after this, I'm all right?" and she patted the pile of press notices from the morning papers.

"Ah!" and she threw her arms above her head with a happy gesture of freedom. "What it is to be independent!"

"But if Mr. Froley is displeased he can dismiss you."

"And I'll warrant there would be three managers ready to bid against one another for my services."

"But, my dear child, how you talk! You've only played the part one night."

"Doesn't matter. In this business, mother dear, things move swiftly. Youth counts for much, and every added day makes us older. Why, I feel like an actress of long standing. I must soon arrange to lose my diamonds."

Two more reporters called during the afternoon; but they got no further than the door. Barbara refused absolutely to be interviewed. When Freda came home at six she brought an armful of evening papers with her. All contained eulogistic notices of Barbara's performance, with the exception of the *Telephone*, which did not mention her.

"I'm sure I care not a whit," said Barbara. "I can get along without the *Telephone* better than its editors can get along without me—judging by the persistency with which they tried to photograph me this morning."

"Why, Barbara," exclaimed Freda, "I never heard you talk like that before. It sounds as though it was some regular actress."

"Artist, my dear. That's what we all call ourselves nowadays."

Truth to tell, Barbara scarcely recognized her-

self. As a matter of fact, ever since she had made that plain statement to Mr. Deering after the performance, she was a different creature. Before that she had been a novice on the stage, subservient to the dictation of others. Now she felt the impulse to assert herself, and all her meekness vanished.

"Barbara, I do hate to have you go to the theater and come home alone," Mrs. Van Dyke commented, as she was starting off.

"Well, I suppose I shall have plenty of offers of company now," Barbara retorted. "In fact, I had one last night."

"Oh, Barbara, who?" demanded Freda breathlessly.

"The stage manager; but I declined—politely, I hope. No, mother, I should think you would be glad to leave matters as they are."

When she reached the theater she noticed a difference in the greeting of even the Cerberus at the gate. His "Good evening, Miss Brandon," was the essence of respect. Hitherto she had received from him merely a nod.

Dolly Danvers and Miss Rice seemed rather to stand in awe of her. But Barbara kissed them both, and that broke the ice at once.

"Aren't you just the happiest girl in New York?" cried Dolly. "Only think of the notices you've got."

"And you deserved every one of them," added Mabel Rice.

Barbara was curious to note what sort of reception she would get from Mr. Deering. But he was busy when she reached the wings, and she went on without seeing him. She had a hearty reception from the audience, and was feeling in great spirits when Deering came on for his first scene with her.

Then it did not take her many minutes to discover the despicable fashion in which he sought revenge. Deliberately, skilfully, without appearing to slight his own part, he set out to ruin the effect of hers. By an instant's delay here, a second's anticipation of an effect there, he made it seem as if she were not keeping up to the average of her previous night's work.

Of course he was powerless to go very far in this course, but Barbara recognized his intention, and was furious. When she came off it was her impulse to go straight to Mr. Froley with a full statement of facts. But that smacked so of tattletaling at school that she could not bring herself to do it.

"Surely he will notice it is not my fault," she told herself.

But this was poor consolation, and her indignation against the stage manager rose to fever heat.

"It is monstrous that any one should stoop so low," she muttered.

Her next scene she had to herself, and although it was hard to put her trouble out of her mind, she firmly determined not to let the memory of it affect her work. She succeeded so admirably that Mr. Froley came up to her on her exit.

"Excellent, Miss Brandon!" he exclaimed. "But why is your acting so uneven this evening? I am making allowance for the reaction of the second night, but your first scene was quite inferior to this second one."

"I am afraid you will find all the scenes I play with Mr. Deering below the mark."

Barbara had no time to think. She simply stated the clear truth.

"Why, how is that? Mr. Deering has been your ardent supporter from the first."

"Watch him narrowly, then, tonight, and see whether it is his fault or mine. Perhaps he has been drinking," added Barbara, wishing to be as charitable as she could.

"Impossible. Deering is not that sort of man;" and Mr. Froley walked away, looking mystified.

But in the finale to the first act Barbara saw him in the wings, his eyes fixed on the pair of them. Deering saw him, too, and played

straight into her hands, perhaps suspecting that she might have reported matters.

"Are we to be friends again?" he whispered between the fall of the curtain and its rise on the encore. It was the first time he had spoken to her out of the part tonight.

Her only reply was a look of utter contempt, which she was obliged to transform into a smile for the audience as the curtain rose and they were once more disclosed to view. He left her without another word, and she was so strangely silent while she was changing her costume that both her companions remarked on it.

"Oh, we all have our troubles," she replied to their queries—"even girls who happen to get 'fat' press notices, as you call them."

Her next scene she looked forward to with a sense of relief. Deering was not in it till the very last. But she reckoned without her host. Soon after her entrance she was supposed to take a letter from a woodpecker's nest in a tree trunk.

"Ah, here it is," were her lines.

She said them, but horror of horrors! her hand felt only vacancy in the orifice. No letter was there! There was a fearful pause. Barbara was too inexperienced to know what to do on the instant. She stood there gazing fixedly before her like one in a dream.

XV.

HIGH WORDS.

"DEERING has done this," was the conviction that came to Barbara in the first seconds of that awful moment when she realized that she could not wed action to words. But the knowledge of who was responsible for her predicament did not supply her with a way out of it. She stood there, her hand in the woodpecker's nest, while a fearful, soul-dismaying silence fell on the theater.

Perhaps she might have thought of some device with which to cover the slip had her mind not been taken up with scorn for the man who had stooped so low in order to gratify his petty spite. She knew that she could never prove it against him; that she was powerless.

She had the stage to herself. There was none to whom she could turn for help. Of course she knew the contents of the letter by heart, but she could not pretend to have it concealed in her hand, as she was called on to drop it in loathing after reading, and apostrophize it as it fell.

"Go on, go on!" she suddenly heard Mr. Sommers calling to her from over his music rack.

The sound of the words lent her inspiration. Reckless where this change in the plot might lead, she withdrew her hand with the cry, "No, it is gone, gone!" and rushed from the stage.

To those who had not seen the play before, there was nothing amiss in the action, barring perhaps, the pause, but consternation reigned behind the scenes. Mr. Deering met Barbara in the wings with a stern face.

"What did you say that for?" he demanded.

"You have thrown out the action of the entire piece. What are we going to do now?"

"I'm sure I don't care," answered Barbara looking him straight in the eye. "It was not my fault the letter was not there. I had to say something."

"You might have thought of something cleverer than this;" and the stage manager, on whom his own boomerang had descended, went rushing about like mad, while the stage waited and the audience wondered what had happened.

He finally came up to Barbara just as she was starting for her dressing room. He held in his hand the all important letter.

"Here!" he exclaimed. "You must go on and read it. Say you found the wind had blown it away. At once! There is not an instant to lose!"

His tone was insolent. Barbara knew that if

she had been a man she would have struck him down where he stood. As it was, she was minded to keep on her way and let him get out of the difficulty as best he might. But she knew that if the performance at a house like Froley's terminated in a dreadful fiasco it would be her name, not his, that would be associated with it.

"Here!" She snatched the paper from his hand, hurried on the stage and carried out his bidding.

At her exit, Mr. Froley, who had been in the box office during the fearful "wait," came up to her with lowering brow.

"What have you been doing, Miss Brandon?" he wanted to know.

"The letter was not where it should have been," replied Barbara, striving to keep her voice calm. "That was not my fault. I did the best I could under the circumstances. And I want to say right now, Mr. Froley, that I wish to be released from my engagement."

The manager lost his usual self possession and looked his amazement.

"Confound it, miss!" he exclaimed. "Have I struck in you one of those cranky 'artists' who want to keep their names before the public by constant 'kicking' behind the scenes? Go to your room, and let us hear no more nonsense of this sort."

Upon this Barbara lost her temper completely. Stepping up to Mr. Frole, who was so short that she towered above him, she held his eye steadily as she said in a determined voice :

"Apologize for addressing me in that tone, or I refuse absolutely to finish out my part to-night."

Mr. Frole retreated a pace or two, and forced a smile.

"I am sure I beg your pardon, Miss Brandon," he said, "if my words have displeased you. But when a man hears that his performance is threatened with ridicule, he is apt to be a little hasty with—with——"

"You are right to hesitate about calling me the delinquent," broke in Barbara.

"Oh, as to that, I have already dismissed the property man."

"Reinstate him immediately. It was not his fault, I am sure of that. I know who is responsible for the whole affair, but of course it will do me no good to mention names. If you can replace me in the cast tomorrow night I shall be obliged."

They had been talking in a deserted corner of the wings, with only a scene shifter darting past now and then to catch a stray word.

"Oh, come, Miss Brandon!" Mr. Frole exclaimed. "You had better see me in my office

tomorrow morning. If it is a question of salary——”

“It is not a question of salary,” Barbara interposed. “It is a matter of my peace of mind. If you offered me one hundred dollars a week I would not remain in your company a moment longer than I could help.”

Mr. Froley drew himself up.

“Very well, miss,” he replied. “You are the sort of bird, I see, that persists in fluttering against the bars of its cage, and for such I have no use. You may consider your engagement at an end with Saturday night’s performance.”

With this, he turned his back on her and walked away. Barbara hurried to her dressing room, feeling as if she had been part of the week’s wash that had just been run through the mangle. But what was worse, she knew she had to be dragged back again in that scene in the last act with Deering.

“Never mind, though,” she told herself. “In a few days I shall be rid of him forever.”

The future, outside of this, did not trouble her. She felt that with those press notices she would have but little trouble in procuring another engagement.

“And I shall throw up every one of them,” she said to herself, “rather than submit to those attentions of the stage manager of which I have

heretofore read a little, and now by sad experience know much."

Dolly and Mabel Rice came in at this moment.

"Oh, my dear," exclaimed the former, "how you must have quaked during that terrible pause! Was Mr. Frolely horribly mad? I saw him talking to you."

"I think I was the angrier of the two," responded Barbara, adding: "You girls will have a chance for my part now. I'm going to leave Saturday night."

"Jiminy cricks!" exclaimed Dolly. "Did he bounce you?"

"No; I 'bounced' myself. Told him I wouldn't stay in his company an instant longer than I could help."

"How did you dare say that to him?" gasped timid Mabel Rice.

"Because I felt it through and through. Now tell me, Dolly, how I had better set to work to get another position."

"I'd go to Tom Davies, at the Forrest, the first thing in the morning. He puts on a line of plays that ought to just suit you. But I'm awfully sorry you're going. Why——"

Dolly stopped there with her mouth open. She had been quick to perceive that Barbara was different from the other girls, and now realized that if she had meant them to know her real

reasons for quitting Froley's she would have told them before this.

"Thank you for the suggestion. The Forrest is a good house. I had not thought about it."

"I'll watch for your name on the bills there. I'm sure you'll get on."

Dolly and her companion hurried off again, and shortly afterwards Barbara followed them, to go through the ordeal of that last scene with Deering. But he was very considerate. He looked as if he felt thoroughly ashamed of himself, and when the curtain fell turned from her without a word.

Her mother and Freda were asleep when she reached home, but the next morning she rose in time for early breakfast, surprising them both.

"Why, what does this mean, Barbara?" exclaimed her mother.

"It means that I have resigned my position at Froley's and must go hunting another."

"Resigned it?" cried both mother and sister in one breath.

"Yes; I suppose you would have been less surprised to hear that I had been turned off."

"But what was your reason, Barbara?" demanded Freda. "Hurry and tell me before I have to go."

"It was the stage manager, Mr. Deering, who

plays the opposite part to me in the play. He wanted to take me out to supper after the first night's performance, and then, when I refused to let him do that, he asked if he could see me home. Of course I wouldn't hear to his doing that either, so he got mad, tried to 'queer' my part, and ended by making a guy of me on the stage."

She then told the story of the missing letter, and her belief that the stage manager was at the bottom of it.

"But why didn't you let him walk home with you?" Freda wanted to know. "There wouldn't have been any harm in that. I'm sure it would be just as proper as for you to come streaking through the streets by yourself at that hour."

Barbara fixed such a long look on her sister that the latter finally dropped her eyes and began to fuss nervously with her napkin, while a slight flush crept into her cheeks.

"You don't understand that life, my pet," Barbara finally said. "I pray Heaven you may never understand it."

XVI.

A CURIOUS CHRISTMAS GIFT.

AFTER Freda had gone that morning Barbara told her mother all the facts in her experience at Froley's.

"So you see, my dear," she concluded, "you have nothing to fear from the influence of the life on me. I always have the alternative of resigning, as I have done in this case. I simply carry my wares to another market. By and by these people will learn that I am not to be trifled with."

In spite of these confident words, she was not altogether at ease later in the morning when she sent in her card to Mr. Davies, at the offices of the Forrest Theater. She had written on it "Violet Brandon," and had the satisfaction of feeling that the name was at least recognized when the boy came back with the message that Mr. Davies would see her in a few moments.

She found him in strong contrast to Mr. Froley, who might be said to represent the student type of managers, whereas Mr. Davies had the manner of the business man.

"Good morning, Miss Brandon," was his greeting, as he advanced to meet her with extended hand. "I am happy to make your acquaintance. Won't you be seated?"

"Thank you more for your good memory than for the chair," responded Barbara, in her original way. "I was afraid you might not know who 'Violet Brandon' was."

"I'll be frank with you," was the manager's reply. "Perhaps I should not have known had you waited till the week after your first appearance in 'The Summer Girl.' I have a good many names to carry in my head. But what can I do for you?"

This with a glance at a pile of letters lying before him on his desk.

"I am leaving Mr. Froley on Saturday." Barbara determined to take a businesslike short cut to her errand. "I should like to ask if you have anything for me after that."

Mr. Davies could not forbear whistling his surprise.

"Why!" he exclaimed. "How comes it Froley lets you go? I thought—well, the critics were certainly very good to you last Tuesday."

"I suppose he thinks I am taking advantage of that fact, and you may be of the same mind, but I assure you, Mr. Davies, it is not a matter

of salary. The reasons for my leaving so abruptly are quite personal. Is there any opening with you?"

Mr. Davies said nothing for a second or two. He ran his eye over a letter he had picked up, then brought his gaze back to his caller with a sort of apologetic gesture.

"No, Miss Brandon," he said then, "I can't place you just now. You know the piece we have on here is a great go, so there is no immediate call to change the bill, and my road companies are all full for the season. But if you will note your address on your card I shall certainly bear you in mind when we make a change, and I may have something for you then."

"Thank you very much," said Barbara conventionally, while her heart sank at the prospect of an indefinite "wait." She wrote the street number, and rose at once.

"Drop in again some time later in the winter," Mr. Davies said, as he shook hands. "Of course, if another opportunity comes your way, don't hesitate to take up with it. Meantime, if anything now unexpected turns up with us, I'll send for you and run my chances of finding you disengaged. Good morning."

Barbara stepped into the elevator, realizing how much pleasanter this interview had been than the first one she had had with Mr. Froley.

But the result of the latter was a position, and now she was coming away all at sea as to her plans. Her "hit," then, on which she had based so many hopes, and which had served as her rock of independence, was to be likened to an electric light minus the wire completing the circuit. If managers had no opening she was of no use to them.

"But never mind," she told herself consolingly. "There are other theaters in town."

However, she determined not to try any more until she had an interview with Dolly Danvers that night. This thought reminded her of Mr. Deering, and she looked forward to the evening with dread. How *could* she play with him, remembering all he had done against her? But she resolved not to shirk her work in consequence.

"There is no knowing what manager may be in front, and I must always keep my best foot foremost."

She bought a dramatic paper and devoted the afternoon to reading it, striving to put herself in closer touch with a profession on which the well being of her family now depended.

"Well, did Davies give you anything?" was Dolly's greeting in the dressing room that night.

"No, only promises. I want to ask your advice about where to apply next."

"Well, if Davies hasn't anything, with all his companies, I'm afraid there's nothing left for you but to put your name down at one of the agencies."

"What happens then?"

"Why, they put you in touch with a company that happens to need just such a person, and then take a percentage of your salary."

"Something like an intelligence office," supplemented Barbara.

"More or less," laughed Dolly, as she and Mabel Rice went up to sing the opening chorus.

Barbara need not have worried about her relations with Mr. Deering for these few remaining performances. He never addressed her off the stage, and went through his part with her faithfully, but as if she were always *Gladys Ber-ringford*, never any one else.

So the days and nights slipped by, the end of the week came, Barbara received her twenty five dollars, said good by to Dolly and Miss Rice, and shook the dust of Froley's Theater from her feet. She had gone to two or three of the dramatic agencies, stated her qualifications, and left typewritten copies of her notices, together with her address. Then there was nothing for her to do but wait.

And she was not patient at this. Hers was a restless spirit, and she chafed bitterly at her

powerlessness. There was humiliation, too, in the thought of her self confidence and its outcome.

On Tuesday came a letter from one of the agents, offering her a position with a burlesque company of seventh or eighth magnitude, about to start on the road. She would be required to play the *Queen of Night*. Barbara scented tights at once, and wrote an indignant refusal. The same morning she saw by the dramatic papers that Vinnie Trent now had her part in "The Summer Girl." There was no comment on the change; merely the bare statement.

Time went on and Christmas drew near. The money in the bank was steadily dwindling. Barbara began to grow desperate. Every time she read an item regarding the continued success of the play running at the Forrest, she regarded it almost as a personal grievance.

Freda's pittance of four dollars a week was now their only income. On top of all, their mother fell ill, and there was the doctor's bill to pay and a constantly growing account at the drug store.

Two days before Christmas Barbara sat down to the realization of the fact that there was barely enough funds to meet the next month's rent. What should they live on after that? The hundred and fifty dollars of which they had

been robbed during the cable car runaway now seemed like a fortune, and the fifteen dollars a week she had received in the chorus at Froley's appeared in retrospect as a princely income.

"What a Christmas!" Barbara muttered between her set teeth.

Mrs. Van Dyke was still confined to her bed. Freda had a fearful cold, but would not stay at home from work. Barbara went down the long flights to the letter box half a dozen times a day in the hope of finding a summons from Mr. Davies.

On Christmas Eve she went to the grocery store at the corner to buy a few necessities for the table. The grocer held up a beautiful bunch of white grapes.

"Here is something you ought to get for tomorrow, Miss Van Dyke," he said.

"No Christmas presents for us this year, Mr. Masters," she replied, with a sad little smile.

Some instinct caused her to turn as she spoke. She met the gaze of a young fellow standing next her, whom she recognized as having seen in their flat house. He dropped his eyes, and immediately edged away through the crowd. His face dwelt in her memory a few moments, for some inexplicable reason, and then the recollection of her troubles drove it from her mind.

Although no member of the little family had

spoken of the matter, each had dreaded the approach of this holiday, preëminently the family one in the calendar. Mrs. Van Dyke and Freda, as if fearful to face old memories, went to bed almost as soon as the dinner things were out of the way. But Barbara sat up. She knew she could not sleep; it was but a mockery to lie down.

"But I am only burning gas uselessly," she thought finally, rousing herself from a reverie in which her nights on the stage appeared as some fantastic figment of the imagination.

She looked at the clock. It was after eleven. Starting up, she was about to turn out the light at once, when a quick flash of something white caught her eye in the hallway. It was an envelope, and it had just been shoved in under the door.

Thinking she might be dreaming, Barbara rushed forward and snatched it up. No, it was real, and crinkled in her hand!

Hastily tearing it open, she stood as one stunned at beholding a hundred dollar bill and a fifty, the very ones of which Freda had been robbed.

XVII.

A RUN OF LUCK.

THERE was no scrap of writing about the envelope to show whence the mysterious Christmas gift had come, and as soon as she had recovered from her first shock of amazement Barbara flew to the door, threw it open, and looked out into the little hallway.

There was no one there ; not a sound came from the other flats below them.

"It's Providence," she murmured, "as she came back and closed the door again—" Providence in the shape of the pricking conscience of the thief."

But how did he know where they lived? To be sure, they had left their address with the police, but had detectives recovered the money they would surely not return it in this mysterious fashion.

They were the very notes, too, Mrs. Van Dyke had drawn from the bank—crisp and new. They had evidently never been out of the thief's possession. It must have been he, then, who brought them back.

An involuntary little shiver passed over Barbara as she realized that the man had just been so near her—must be some one who knew all about them. And right here an idea flashed over her. She recalled the young fellow in the grocery store, who had looked at her in such a peculiar manner when she had said, "No Christmas for us this year." She remembered now that he had slunk away at once, leaving her with a puzzled conviction of having seen him in some more notable place than the stairways of their flat house. Now she knew that he had been with them in the cable car runaway: must have been the man who got on as they did, of which circumstance Freda had a hazy recollection.

"He must have been just around the turn of the stairs and heard us talking about dividing the money as we went out," Barbara told herself. "And my chance words put it into his heart to bring it back this Christmas Eve. Well, he can't be so very bad, or he'd have spent it long ago."

She wished it were not so late. It would have been great sport to go out, buy some presents, and surprise the others with them in the morning. In default of this she pinned the hundred dollar bill to her mother's pillow, the fifty to Freda's, then went to bed and slept as she had not expected to sleep on this night of tender memories.

She had all the fun she had anticipated in the morning when the money was discovered.

"It's Santa Claus, sure enough!" Freda kept declaring, but when Barbara told the facts, linking them to her theory, the rejoicing was tinged with alarm.

"A thief in this very house!" exclaimed Mrs. Van Dyke. "We are not safe for an instant."

"Oh, yes, we are," Barbara assured her, "from such a soft hearted thief as that. Besides, we are not certain that he lives here. He may only visit somebody in the house. But after what he has done we surely have no cause to fear him, so let us take the goods the gods provide, asking no questions!"

"Then you wouldn't advise searching him out and having him arrested?" added her mother.

"What for? For bringing our money back to us?"

"No, you silly girl. For stealing it from us in the first place."

"I am not sure, though, that that wasn't a blessing in disguise," Barbara persisted. "Suppose we had had the one hundred and fifty while I was on that princely salary at Froley's. We might have gone into all sorts of extravagances on the strength of it. Now we have it intact."

"Barbara Van Dyke!" exclaimed her mother. "To think I should live to hear you condoning a theft!"

"Well, I'm so happy at getting the money back I believe I'd even smile at Mr. Deering if I met him, which is about as strong as I can put it."

Barbara's abounding spirits over the recovery of the money would not suffer her to be passive enough to return thanks properly in church with her mother and sister.

"I must be out in the open," she declared. "It is such a glorious day, too, so I'm going for a brisk walk in the Park."

She had not been here for months; not indeed since she had driven through it when they possessed a carriage of their own, and it used to be a bore at times to exercise the horses. There was a little snow on the meadows, but the paths were clear of it. The air was crisp, the sky blue, and Barbara's spirits of quite a roseate shade, even though her prospects of earning an income were no brighter than the day before.

"But something is sure to happen before that hundred and fifty gives out," she reflected hopefully.

Something did happen the very next minute. Turning a bend in the path Barbara came face to face with Allan Thurwell. Both were walking

briskly, and they had nearly collided. They laughed as they held out their hands, and then :

"Merry Christmas !" they exclaimed simultaneously.

"May I turn and walk with you a way?" Thurwell asked. "It's not exactly the weather for loitering. I'm delighted at meeting you. I was feeling a bit blue and came out to liven myself up."

"And I came because I was too exuberant to stay in church," Barbara confessed impulsively. "But what makes you blue on Christmas of all days?"

"I shouldn't be blue—have been blue, I should say now," he interpolated, with a graceful little bow in recognition of her presence—"if it hadn't been Christmas. You see my home is clear out in Minnesota, too far to go very often, although I was there last year. And now may I dare inquire the cause of your special exuberance?"

"Certainly. The recovery of money that had been stolen. That means a great deal to us now, Mr. Thurwell."

She hesitated. Should she tell him of her career on the stage?

"I am so sorry," he returned, with quick apprehension of her meaning. "You left so abruptly that morning I met you at the office. I

wanted to ask permission to call. You know we were such friends that summer."

She looked up at him with a twinkle of fun in her eyes.

"And aren't we friends now?" she asked.

"I hope we are—the best of friends," he rejoined earnestly. "But I was afraid you might not care to keep up the acquaintance with a poor clerk here in town."

Barbara laughed more merrily than she had done in weeks.

"And I was afraid to ask you to call because I thought you wouldn't care to come to our plain little flat, up four flights of stairs and in a neighborhood swarming with children. You must come now;" and she gave him the number, which he stopped to inscribe in his notebook.

A couple of equestrians dashed by them, and they fell to talking of horseback riding, and it was not a long road from that to rowing, and so to reminiscences of their Adirondack experiences.

The subject was not exhausted when they reached the entrance to the Van Dyke flat.

"Come and see me soon, won't you?" she said at parting. "We've each made a clean breast of it now, and so there's not a shred of ceremony left for us to stand on."

He promised to come as speedily as he dared, and when he had gone Barbara called herself a

fool all the way up the stairs, because she had not invited him to stay and take a pot luck Christmas dinner with them.

"He as much as confessed he was lonely, and here I've gone and sent him off to a solitary meal, simply because I knew we didn't have a turkey in the house. Never mind. I'll have to be extra gracious to him when he comes to call."

It was easy to say "never mind." If Barbara could have looked ahead and seen what might have been avoided had she invited Allan Thurwell to dinner, she would have rushed down stairs and torn after him to beg him to come back.

There was still a chance to avoid the impending calamity if she had but told of her morning's pleasure when her mother and sister came home. But she was so conscious of the high regard she had for Thurwell that maidenly modesty locked her lips against the very mention of him to those who knew him not.

"I'll keep him as a surprise for them when he calls," she told herself. "Then I can get their opinion of him before I express my own."

The next morning's mail brought Barbara the third item in her Christmasy run of luck—a letter from Mr. Davies asking her to call at his office that morning.

"The tide has turned at last!" she cried, waving the precious slip aloft.

XVIII.

A MIDNIGHT REVELATION.

MR. DAVIES received Barbara very graciously when she presented herself at his office the next day.

“ ‘Tangled Threads’ hasn’t yet lost its hold on the public,” he began, “but Miss Westcott has suddenly decided to get married and leave the stage. She plays the adventuress, you know.”

“And you want me for that?” exclaimed Barbara, in a tone of horror that was not feigned.

“I thought you would be delighted. You are eminently suited to such a rôle—tall, dark, imperious looking. Oh, I assure you it is far more important than the one you were playing at Froley’s. Have you found nothing to do since you left there?”

“Nothing that I cared to accept.”

“And surely, Miss Brandon, you are not going to let a foolish prejudice against a ‘villainess’ stand in the way of your professional advancement? I tell you frankly that is the sort of work your type is best adapted to. You must make your quarrel with nature, not the managers.”

"What is the salary?" asked Barbara in a businesslike tone.

"Fifty dollars a week."

Mr. Davies watched her narrowly as he made this reply; but she had herself well in hand, and her face showed no emotion one way or the other.

"Well," she said, after a pause, "I haven't seen the play yet, and——"

"Here's a pass for tonight, but you'd better take the part and study it mean time. Miss Westcott wants to leave just as soon as I can let her go, and you are much better fitted to the rôle than any understudy on my list."

"Very well," said Barbara, rising and taking the manuscript.

"You will come to rehearsal, then, at eleven tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Then we will sign the contract at once;" and in a few minutes the deed was done.

"But I needn't plume myself," Barbara reflected, on her way home. "So far as I can see, my getting both the engagements I have had is due more to accident than any talent I possess. In the one case it was a bicycle spill; in the other, a marriage. Then, if I was short and light, with the appearance of being sweet tempered, I suppose I might apply for a position

till I grew gray. But fifty dollars—think of it !”

Barbara did think of it all the way back to the flat, and talked of it volubly after she got there. After lunch she locked herself up in her room to look over the part of *Lady Bingham*.

“Well,” she said aloud, when she had gone through it, “Mr. Davies was right in calling her an adventuress. But I suppose she points a moral—if people will only see it.”

However, she determined to take her mother, rather than Freda, to the performance that night, thus unconsciously forging another link in the chain of destiny.

Somewhat to her surprise, Freda did not object to being left behind. If Barbara had not been so excited herself over the position she had secured so unexpectedly, she might have been puzzled by the exhibition of the same state of mind in her sister.

The Forrest was one of the handsomest of the newer theaters in the metropolis, and its patronage was drawn almost exclusively from the fashionable class. Both Barbara and her mother were intensely interested in the play and in the fine acting. Donald Farrington, the leading man, they had both heard of, although he had risen to fame since they had ceased going to the theater. Amy Drown, the leading woman was

an old established favorite, and as Barbara heard a girl say behind her, was "just too sweet for anything."

Miss Westcott was very good as *Lady Bingham*, but Barbara felt that the part, although intensely disagreeable, was within her scope.

"It is a good deal easier to do that sort of thing," Barbara told her mother—"lots of action and swagger and shoulder shrugs—than to reveal character in fainter outline, as Miss Amy Drown has to do."

The play was frankly of the "problem" order, and Barbara was glad she had not brought Freda; but it was beautifully written by one of the leading English dramatists, and certainly pointed a strong moral.

"Of course I'd rather have Amy Drown's part," she said, as they came away, "but somebody must play *Lady Bingham*, and I suppose I ought to consider myself mighty lucky to get it."

Freda was waiting up for them with flushed cheeks and shining eyes.

"I want to sleep with you tonight, Barbara," she said, and the older sister knew at once that there was a confidential revelation forthcoming.

But until the light was out Freda kept her talking about the play, and not till they had been in bed quite a little while did the younger sister suddenly exclaim, with her heart in her voice:

"Oh, Barbara, I'm so happy, and to think that you have known him all this time!"

As if with a premonition of what was coming, a chill seized on Barbara's heart. The darkness she felt was the one thing she had to be grateful for.

"Known whom, Freda?"

It seemed that these three words were all she had the strength to utter. And they were so useless, too, as instinct told her what would be the answer.

"Why, Allan Thurwell. He was here to-night, and—and oh, Barbara, isn't he just perfectly splendid?"

Barbara thought of novels she had read, in which two sisters were in love with the same man. She remembered one in particular, which she had enjoyed thoroughly snuggled in a big easy chair before the library fire, eating apples luxuriously while she devoured chapter after chapter of the absorbing narrative. How little she realized then that she would one day take actual part in such an experience.

"But how did you come to know him, Freda?" she asked. "He never spoke of you to me."

"Of course he didn't, because he didn't know my name until today."

"Why, Freda, and yet you talk of him as though he was an old friend!"

"Well, he is, in a sense, because I've known him for three months and seen him almost every day."

"And you never said a word about it here at home !"

"That was because I didn't know who he was for a long time. Any way, it was all so romantic I was afraid you would laugh at me. But I'll tell you all about it. It began the second morning I went down to the office. I was getting off the elevated train. I was the last one. I had forgotten that was my station, and the guard had signaled to go ahead. My coat caught in the gate, the train started on, and I would have been dragged with it had not a young man, coming from one of the rear cars, seen my danger. He sprang forward, held me in his arms till he got the jacket loose, and nothing was hurt in the least—not even my coat."

"But you never told us about it. You might have been killed."

"Yes ; you see, I didn't want to worry you and mother. It might have been very serious but for Mr. Thurwell. He had me lean on his arm when he found we were both going the same way. And I've met him lots of times since, going down mornings in the train. Of course I couldn't look straight in the face of a man who had saved my life and refuse to recognize him,

just because nobody who happened to know us both had mumbled our names over. But I found out his name from our office boy, who often goes on errands to the Knickerbocker Insurance Company."

"And how did he learn yours?" asked Barbara faintly.

"Why, from the letter I got from Carrie Trask this morning. I had it in my hand, and he happened to see the address."

"Do you know Barbara Van Dyke?" he exclaimed.

"I ought to," I answered, "since she is my sister."

"Then he told me how he had met you in the Adirondacks two summers ago with Mrs. Stanton.

"What a splendid secret!" I cried. "But I can't keep it long. Come around and see me very soon, and we'll give Barbara a big surprise."

"He said he'd try to get around tonight, as he had engagements for the other evenings this week, and he came; and, Barbara," very softly, "I'm afraid I wasn't as sorry as I ought to have been that you and mother were out."

Barbara made no reply. She lay there, her finger nails pressed tightly to the palms of her hands. There was no use denying facts. She knew now that she loved Allan Thurwell with her whole soul. And the pity of it was that she

did not awake to the knowledge till it was borne in upon her that her sister loved him, too.

And how about Thurwell? Had he come to see her or Freda that evening? Barbara could not ask. Freda must not know that she had ever had a thought for him beyond mere friendship's limits.

Meantime Freda was talking on, singing the praises of the man she had met under circumstances well calculated to idealize him in the heart of an impressionable young girl like herself.

"She must have encouraged him," Barbara found herself thinking; and then with a realization that she was accusing her own sister, she tried to find excuses for her, but when found they proved gall and wormwood to her own stricken heart.

"He left his kind regards for you, and told me to say he was sorry you were out. But he is coming again very soon. You know he boards, and must grow dreadfully lonesome, poor boy!"

Barbara lay awake, listening to all this; and for hours after Freda had finally dropped off to sleep she lay there in a dumb anguish, fighting the hardest battle of her life.

"I must never see him again. It can be easily arranged, with my engagement at the

theater," she planned. "Then Freda will be happy. And—and it doesn't matter about me. I have always been big and strong, and have watched out for her. I must not shirk my duty now. And he is a worthy man ; I am sure of that."

And so she lay, thinking, renouncing, till the tardy light of the December day stole in at the window.

XIX.

A HIT WITH A STRING TO IT.

THE next morning, just before they joined their mother at breakfast, Freda suddenly went up to Barbara, put her arms about her, and laid her cheek close to hers for an instant.

"Let us have what I told you last night for a secret between us, dear," she whispered.

"No, pet, I shall not speak of it to mother," was Barbara's rejoinder, and Freda looked relieved.

She glanced at the clock several times while they were at the table, and now Barbara recalled that she had often noticed this before. Then she had attributed it to fear of being late at the office, but in the light of her present knowledge she could guess the real reason. And while Mrs. Van Dyke was out of the room Freda herself told it.

"I always take the express," she said. "I don't have to leave so early, and I get to the office in plenty of time."

This, then, accounted for her meeting Thurgood so regularly at such an apparently uncertain trysting place as the elevated road.

"You look worn out, Barbara," said her mother when Freda had gone. "Don't you feel well, child?"

"My head aches a little," Barbara admitted.

"I am afraid you will not do yourself justice at the rehearsal then."

"Oh, yes, I shall. I feel just up to it. The rôle has grown upon me. I think I shall like it now."

In fact, it was only in studying the characteristics of this woman who sought to ruin the happiness of the man whom she had once ensnared, and whose love had gone out to a pure young girl—it was only while Barbara was endeavoring to permeate herself with these instincts—that she could forget the blight that had fallen on her own joy.

Whenever she thought of Thurwell it seemed as if it must be of some one who was dead. She realized now that even when there had seemed to be no possibility of her ever meeting him again, the very recollection that she had once known such a man was a source of happiness to her.

Now she wished it were possible to forget him; once or twice she even caught herself thinking what a relief it would be if he were only to do some despicable thing that would at once destroy all her respect for him. Then would

come the inevitable revulsion against such a degradation of a really beloved object, and again her heart would be torn between conflicting emotions.

She was glad, indeed, when she reached the theater, where, for a time, she might forget her own woes in endeavoring to portray those of the dramatist's puppets. Mr. Davies himself was on the stage to meet her, and introduced her to the other members of the cast, who, she found, had been called together for the express purpose of rehearsing her. Miss Drown laughingly alluded to this fact in her greeting.

"I hope you noticed, Miss Brandon," she said, "that I did not tell you I was glad to meet you. That would have been a falsehood. Really, you know we are all horribly cross because we must cut short our morning nap to give you your cues. But of course you are not to blame. It is all the fault of that wretched Lillian Westcott falling in love with a broker and insisting on getting married before the season ends."

"Oh, come, Amy," broke in Donald Farrington, "what will Miss Brandon think of such brutal frankness? You must remember that she is not accustomed to our ways yet. Am I not right, Miss Brandon?"

"Yes. My first appearance was this fall at Froley's, and I was there for only a few nights."

"It was not the fault of your abilities that you didn't stay longer, I understand," went on Farrington.

"Oh, what do they say about it? What have you heard?" exclaimed Barbara, turning to him eagerly.

"Pshaw! It's only the gossip of the Rialto. You know Froley had to invent some excuse for losing you."

"Yes, indeed," Miss Drown interjected. "Everybody who happened to see the fine notices you got was perfectly amazed to hear you had dropped out so suddenly. I, for one, made sure you had followed Lillian's example."

"But what did they say at Froley's, Mr. Farrington?" Barbara persisted. "I am anxious to hear their version."

"You are sure you won't mind?" he smiled.

"I shouldn't ask if I would," she retorted quickly.

"Here goes, then, and I'll have to hurry, for I see Burley's arrived, and we've got to begin in a jiff. The Froley story runs that you got an enlarged cranium from your press notices, and immediately proceeded to dictate to everybody about you. It is even whispered that you talked back to Froley himself."

"I made him apologize to me," Barbara told them, with a grim smile.

"Ye gods, how rich! Shake again on that, Miss Brandon. We'll get up a testimonial for you."

Mr. Davies appeared at this moment, and the rehearsal began. Barbara was keyed up to a high pitch, and read her lines in a way that surprised herself.

"By Jove, Miss Brandon," Farrington said to her during one of their breathing spells, "haven't you really had any more experience than those few nights at Froley's?"

"Not on the professional stage. I've acted now and then in an amateur way."

"But you handled that last scene like an old timer."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Farrington," was all Barbara said.

She could not explain that her own emotions just now found a congenial outlet in the passion of the rôle. Mr. Davies was very much pleased, and told her so frankly.

"You can go on Monday night without any trouble," he added. "You are a marvelously quick study."

"But my gowns!" she interposed.

"True, I had forgotten. But there are only two. Perhaps Miss Drown can suggest where you may be able to get what you want at once."

Barbara found that now she was in so called

straight drama, and out of the chorus, she was expected to pay for her own dresses. But as just now speed was more necessary than elegance of finish, the leading woman suggested a large emporium where she might be able to get what she wanted ready made at a reasonable figure.

"You can order new ones by and by if you like," Miss Drown added. "The piece is surely good for the rest of the season."

With all these matters to attend to, it was dark before Barbara reached home, and then, pleading utter weariness, she went to her room, having had a hasty lunch down town. So she did not see Freda that night, and the next morning she did not rise till after she had gone. But with the morning a new thought had come to her.

"Mother," she said, just before starting for the theater, for there was to be another rehearsal, "there is absolutely no need for Freda to keep on at the office. With my fifty dollars a week we can get along beautifully."

"I was thinking the same thing. I will ask her to tell them she will not come after this week."

But Freda seemed strongly disinclined to meet these views.

"No knowing how long Barbara will stay at the theater," she told her mother. "She's as erratic as she can be. If I give up the place it

may not be so easy to get another. And four dollars a week isn't to be sneezed at when that's the only income a family's got, as it was with us only a few days ago."

"But my dear child, it is perfectly ridiculous for you to make a slave of yourself when there is no present necessity of it."

"I'm not a slave. I like the work, and I would be miserable if I had to give it up. If I do, I'll get a position on the stage. You'll help me to it, won't you, Barbara?"

"No, pet. You should do as mother says."

But Freda would listen to no more. She left the table, went to her room, and shut herself in there.

"I am sure I cannot imagine what has come over the child," remarked Mrs. Van Dyke, with a sigh. "She never acted this way before. You know, Barbara, she has always been much more tractable than you."

Barbara made no response. She knew perfectly well why her sister did not wish to give up going down town every day. Those meetings with Thurwell on the cars were too precious to forego. But when she came to analyze it, Freda's conduct seemed unmaidenly. She used to be retiring, shy almost. Had love changed her so completely, or was it the rude contact with the world of business?

Barbara sighed wearily. No wonder they told her her work at the theater was so natural. Surely there were enough of tangled threads in her own life at present. There was nothing for it but to let Freda have her own way since she was so set on it. Barbara debated about telling their mother of Thurwell, but there was her promise to her sister ; and, besides, any effort of this sort to limit the meetings between them seemed, as she viewed it, to be interested on her part.

Sunday's papers contained an item telling of the change in the cast of "Tangled Threads," owing to Miss Westcott's matrimonial venture ; and adding that the part would be taken by "Miss Violet Brandon, who recently made such a pleasing impression in 'The Summer Girl' at Froley's."

"We may get one or two of the critics here," Mr. Davies told her.

He had given her seats for her mother and sister, and they had accompanied her to the stage door and arranged to meet her after the performance. Freda looked in longingly during the first moment of their lingering there.

The cast was a small one, and Barbara had a dressing room to herself. She was very nervous, but Mr. Farrington told her that was a good sign.

"The people who are perfectly at their ease on a first appearance," he added, "never make any hits."

Barbara certainly made one that night. The scheme of the play was so apposite to her own position that once or twice she quite lost herself in it. For this reason she felt no special elation over the outbursts of applause.

"This is not acting," she told herself; "it is living."

But of course she could not tell this fact to her associates, or to Mr. Davies, who congratulated her in the wings after her curtain call at the close of the third act.

"My dear Miss Brandon," he assured her, "you are a regular mascot. You are repeating your experience at Froleys, but what makes it so extraordinary is the fact that that was a part of an altogether different nature. Your versatility is remarkable!"

"No, it isn't, Mr. Davies," Barbara replied, with a shake of her head and a peculiar smile; "it isn't versatility at all. It is simply chance."

"Fie, Miss Brandon, you are too modest by far;" and the manager went off congratulating himself on his new acquisition.

XX.

THE SHADY SIDE OF JOY.

THERE was only one comment on the change in cast in the next morning's papers. The *Courier* said that Miss Brandon was an altogether satisfactory substitute for Miss Westcott, and that she promised to be a valuable adjunct to the Forrest company. Freda was in raptures over her sister's acting.

"Oh, Barbara," she kept repeating, "you don't know how proud I am of you. I am going to tell Mr. Thurwell all about it, and make him go to see you. You don't mind, do you?"

"No. Why should I? I am not ashamed of my work."

But even as she spoke Barbara wished that she might be placed in some road company. It was constant torture to her to hear Freda speak of Thurwell. In vain she reasoned with herself.

"He has never said one word of love to me. We are scarcely more than acquaintances, and yet here I am moping like a child over a pleasure denied her. Faugh, Barbara Van Dyke, I am ashamed of you!"

She tried every means of turning her mind into a different channel. It was for this reason that she had encouraged sociability with her fellow players on that morning of the first rehearsal.

One thing especially she liked about Donald Farrington, he was so good to Mrs. Barnes, the *grand dame* of the company. She was a dear old lady, much thought of by the public and highly respected by her associates in the profession, of which she had been a member since she was a little girl.

Farrington escorted her home every night, called her "aunty," although she was no sort of relation, and treated her always with a courteous kindness that won Barbara's admiration, because it inspired her respect. She herself grew to be very fond of Mrs. Barnes, who announced that she always took a special interest in beginners.

"Ours is a hard life, my dear," she told Barbara one night, while they were sitting in the wings awaiting their cues. "It looks to be a butterfly existence, but you have been in it long enough, I hope, to see the erroneousness of that view. It is a constant concealing of our own real emotions in order to simulate those which may be as foreign to our natures as ice is to the tropics."

"Then you think there is no art in simply

showing the public what you actually feel?" said Barbara impulsively.

"But how is it possible for us to do that? I do not understand."

Barbara drew a long breath, and feared she had opened up a subject it would not be policy to pursue. However, she must make Mrs. Barnes an answer of some sort.

"I mean," she rejoined, "that if the rôle one is called on to play by chance happens to express emotions to which one is oneself subject, the doing of this well does not signify that the actor can be equally successful in another and dissimilar part."

Mrs. Barnes listened attentively to this explanation, but at the end of it still looked somewhat puzzled.

"Versatility is invaluable to a player," she replied. "Few can mount very high without possessing it. But why do you ask, my dear?"

Just then, however, came Barbara's call for the stage, and she was spared the embarrassment of finding a reply.

The morning following this conversation she received a note from Mr. Thurwell. It ran as follows:

MY DEAR MISS VAN DYKE:

I was so sorry to miss you the night I called. You see I was justly punished for my impatience in taking such prompt advantage of your invitation. Your sister told me of your

engagement at the Forrest, and tonight I went to see you play. You remember I always told you that you had genius in you for this art, and I see that I was no false prophet. May I come Sunday evening to congratulate you in person ?

With kind regards,

Sincerely yours,

ALLAN G. THURWELL.

This letter awoke in Barbara sharp conflicting emotions. The mere fact that he had written to her inspired joy—but there was Freda ! Was it all a mistake ? Had the child—for she was little more—misrepresented matters out of her deep love for the man to whom Barbara's heart had already gone out ?

She tried to look the matter in the face from the stern standpoint of common sense.

"In all the novels," she told herself, "the victims are wilfully blind, and their misery is strung out simply to permit the author to make the requisite number of chapters. Suppose, now, that I were the heroine of one of these, what would I do ?"

She regarded Thurwell's note earnestly for a minute, then resumed her cogitations.

"Well, being the conventional heroine, I suppose I would tear this bit of paper into a hundred pieces, burn them to ashes, turn my back on the writer whenever I saw him, and let my little sister live happily with him ever after. That's all right providing he'd be happy, too. But this letter appears to put a different complexion on

matters. Supposing he really does prefer me to Freda, what is my duty then? Shall I force him from me and try to make him love her, just because her girlish fancy was captivated by a gallant act of his? I knew him first, so I would not be taking him away from her, would only be reaching out to take possession of that which already belonged to me—his friendship. I can see now how it has all come about. He came here that night expecting to see me and found only Freda. She had no reason to suppose that I knew him better than she did and she naturally appropriated the call to herself. He has not been here since, although she has seen him every day. This note looks as if he wanted to straighten the tangle—but Freda, bless her heart, what of her?”

Aye, there was the rub !

“ But if he does not really care for her, will she be any happier whether I see him or not? Besides, I must give him an opportunity to show which one he really wishes to see. Surely we can discover this if I permit him to come on Sunday. I'll ask him to tea.”

The idea was an inspiration, and Barbara acted on it at once, writing as follows :

DEAR MR. THURWELL :

Thanks for your kind words about my new departure. I, too, was sorry to miss you last week. Will you not come to

tea on Sunday at six? I am delighted to find that you are not "shocked" because I have acted on a suggestion you let fall that morning I met you at the insurance office.

Cordially yours,

BARBARA VAN DYKE.

She went out at once and dropped this in the box at the corner.

"I'll keep his coming as a surprise for Freda," she decided—"if he doesn't tell her of it himself."

She went about all day possessed of a feverish excitement. The weight was gone from her heart—except when she thought of Freda. Then she felt like a guilty thing, and compared herself to a Nihilist who has fired a train of powder timed to explode at a given moment.

"But I'm trying the common sense method, not the sentimental novel one," she kept telling herself; and when she arrived at the theater that night she was in great spirits.

Mr. Farrington noticed it, and said he was actually fearing for himself in their great scene.

"You will surely shrivel one with a look to-night," he laughed.

But he was wrong. She had never given such a poor performance. Barbara was not surprised herself, although everybody else was. To her mind only the expected had occurred. But she was so happy she didn't care.

"There is a cold house tonight, Miss Bran-

don," remarked Mr. Davies, encountering her in the wings shortly after her big scene which had failed in getting her a recall. "I can't understand this lack of enthusiasm."

"I am afraid the fault is with me rather than the audience, Mr. Davies," she replied. "I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid I can't be an out and out villainess."

The manager smiled and passed on.

"He evidently thinks I am joking," Barbara mused. "No doubt he attributes it all to some trifling happening which will not affect me on another occasion. But I am afraid—I'm very much afraid for my art—and yet—I am so foolishly happy."

The next night at dinner she waited for Freda to say something in regard to Mr. Thurwell's coming on Sunday, for he had accepted in a brief note to Barbara, which made her heart lighter still. But Freda never mentioned him.

That evening Barbara's performance was no better. Its passionate moments lacked the convincing power she had formerly infused into them. Again her third act scene failed to arouse any enthusiasm, and this time the fault could not be ascribed to the apathy of the public, as both Miss Drown and Mr. Farrington had received rousing ovations.

She did not see Mr. Davies, but as she was

leaving, the doorkeeper handed her a note, which read as follows :

What is the matter ? This is growing serious. I was in front tonight, and heard several comments on your spiritless performance.

T. DAVIES.

Barbara's cheeks burned at the rebuke conveyed, but she knew it was deserved ; that Mr. Davies was only looking out for the interests of his business in calling her down. At the same time she felt herself to be powerless.

"It's just as I feared," she reflected. "I played the part well because it fitted so exactly my own situation. With this changed, I have no inspiration."

The dilemma was a desperate one. How could she be mean and despicable to one man when her heart was singing because of the new hope inspired in her by another ? And yet she must do something or lose her place, and plunge the family in poverty again. It was Saturday, and she had two performances before her.

"And they may be my last," she muttered. Then an idea came to her.

"That is my only chance. With my mind fixed on that aspect of the case, I may be able to redeem myself. I will try it, any way. It's that or failure."

XXI.

SOME VIEWS ON LOVE AND MARRIAGE.

BARBARA'S desperate expedient was simply this: She would strive to think of herself as the cruel arbiter of Freda's fate in taking the latter's lover away from her. It was merely viewing the case from another angle than the one that had hitherto helped in her stage work.

When she went on she saw Mr. Davies in his box watching her. She knew why he was there, gritted her teeth and vowed she wouldn't let his presence disconcert her. Nor did it. She gave the best performance she had yet "put up," but the strain told on her, and on Sunday she was not able to leave her bed until well on in the afternoon.

Not a word all this time had Freda said about Thurwell's coming. Barbara had mentioned to her mother that he was expected to tea. She realized that her sister had been apprised of the fact when she heard that she had taken to her bed with the declaration that she was not well, and would not be able to appear at supper.

Barbara listened to her mother's announce-

ment with a blank face, and felt exactly as though she had taken a club and stricken "the pet" down. She wanted to go to her at once, and in her present mood would have blurted out the whole truth, offered to lay herself upon the altar of sacrifice, and ignored Thurwell utterly in the matter, as the lover is always ignored under these circumstances in the regulation novel. But Mrs. Van Dyke adjured her not to disturb Freda on any account ; all she needed was rest.

"She says she is not going back to the office," the mother added, "so we should be grateful she has at last consented to listen to reason."

Barbara knew well where the "reason" lay, and her heart bled accordingly.

"I wish I had never seen the man," she told herself, and then she wondered if the whole thing were not his fault.

And while she was debating this, the bell rang, and she opened the door to find him standing there.

"I couldn't wait till the time, you see," he said, smiling his gladness at the sight of her.

And with her eyes looking into his frank ones, Barbara could think of nothing but her own joy over his presence.

"Wasn't it strange," he began at once, "that I should know your sister so long without being aware that she bore any relation to you? You

do not look in the least alike. But I want to talk about you and your work. How do you like it? The stage must indeed be a strange environment for you."

"It is. I did not allow it to enshroud me from choice. I was never stage struck. I became an actress when I had exhausted every other method of earning a livelihood for our little family."

"Then—you disapprove of the career? I thought we had outgrown these relics of Puritanical bondage, just as we have lifted the ban from the reading of novels."

Barbara did not reply at once. They were sitting in the little parlor by one of the two windows. The setting sun was casting a reddish tinge over a tiny bit of cloud floating above the housetops across the way.

"Just as my life is tinged with happiness, while poor Freda's is like that," and she let her gaze fall to a dark mass that was surging up from the west to meet the fleecy islands in the blue.

"No," she began then, replying to Thurlwell's question, "I do not say that I disapprove of the stage, but for a woman the life is a frightful one. The never ending excitement wears on her nerves, the constant grind depletes her physical strength, the ceaseless worry about

where the next engagement is coming from deprives her of all sense of comfort in the affluence arising from the present one."

"But you have met with unusual success, Miss Van Dyke. Here you are playing a prominent rôle in your first season in a play that is good for two or three years, either here or on the road. You, personally, have every reason to be pleased with your career."

Barbara smiled as she remembered her uneven work and the causes of it.

"You say that," she answered, "because you know nothing of the real facts. I may lose my position tomorrow night, or Mr. Davies may chance to light upon a play that will lift me to the very heights. It is all a lottery—the biggest one on earth—worse than marriage;" and she smiled.

But the smile was not reflected in Thurwell's face. He leaned toward her and said gravely: "Are you so opposed to marriage, then?"

Barbara laughed merrily. "How wilfully you misread my assertions. You would make me out a veritable pessimist, Mr. Thurwell. Of course, I was only joking then, but now if you want sober earnest, I will say that I believe two thirds of the marriages are unhappy ones."

"This *is* pessimism of the rankest sort;" and Thurwell pretended to have received a severe shock.

"Listen," Barbara went on. "I don't mean that there are that number of cases where people don't love at the start. But there are so many things that cause them to grow away from each other. I may be visionary, but do you know, I think a perfect mating of two souls is so sacred, so wonderful a thing that the genuine cases are as rare as the finding of a pearl in an oyster shell."

Thurwell showed by his face that he was deeply interested.

"Do you believe, Miss Van Dyke," he asked, "that these genuine two pearls sometimes meet and fail to recognize each other?"

"Yes, I do ; and then, perhaps, each goes his or her own way again, and mates with a spurious article through sheer blindness, thus contributing to the excess of unhappy marriages over the happy ones."

"Then, according to you, failing to find the rarest of gems, celibacy is preferable for most of man and womankind."

"Isn't peace preferable to discord? If one never really loves, one surely cannot miss the presence of an object on which to bestow affection."

"What is a test of real love?"

"For one thing, I can tell you at once it is not admiration for a pretty face. That is what half the men marry for."

"And why do the women take them?" Thurwell hastily interposed.

"Because one of the most wicked of conventions holds an old maid up to ridicule, while an old bachelor escapes scot free."

Thurwell laughed.

"But I agree with you fully," he added. "However, I want to put in one plea for my sex. In many, many cases, I am certain, a man is a bachelor not from choice, but necessity. In these days of luxurious living, a man is not so ready to ask a girl to leave the comforts of her father's home to share the makeshifts of one that is in the process of forming."

"How does the man know, though, that to share these makeshifts would not give the girl greater joy than anything else that could be offered her? Real love—the pearl of pearls—gilds poverty as easily as the setting sun sends its rays to tinge the snow capped mountain peaks with glory."

"Tea is ready, Barbara." The announcement struck the two like a cold shower bath. It was followed by a peal of merry laughter from Freda, who stood surveying them from the doorway.

Barbara gazed at her open eyed as she went up to shake hands with Thurwell, rattling on in a harebrained fashion that was certainly surpris-

ing in a girl who had declared she was too ill to get up for supper.

"I couldn't resist giving you the shock. I suspected you two were mooning over the sunset as I came along the hall. Then I stood in the doorway a while and cleared my throat, but nobody heard me; so I waited till Barbara finished her peroration on 'real love,' and brought you back to earth with the short, sharp jerk that was the only way to do it. But come, mother is waiting for us. Don't look at me as if I were a ghost, Barbara. You see, Mr. Thurwell, I have been ill in bed all day, and declared I wasn't able to raise my head, but your presence in the house must be regarded as a magic philter. I certainly feel all right now."

There was no denying that she was the life of the tea table. She chattered on like a magpie, while Barbara sat by in amazement. Mrs. Van Dyke, too, was quite nonplussed, but so delighted at Freda's quick recovery that she spent little time in speculating as to the cause of it.

There were no more tête-à-têtes for Barbara that evening. Her sister kept up a running fire of talk until Thurwell took his departure.

"Isn't he splendid, now?" said Freda as the door closed behind him.

She spoke as if ignoring the fact of Barbara's previous acquaintance with the man.

"He is certainly a perfect gentleman," Mrs. Van Dyke agreed, but Barbara merely nodded her head, without saying a word. It was a peculiarity of the family that the two sisters were never in high mood at one and the same time.

In the silent watches of the night, Barbara reviewed the evening. Thurwell had certainly appeared most deeply interested when they two were chatting quietly together before tea. He had laughed at Freda's rattling on, but at times a certain expression of his face showed that he was annoyed. And yet that was small consolation to Barbara. It was her own sister who caused the feeling. If this was to be expected at every visit, it was not likely he would come often.

"It is 'Tangled Threads' with me in very truth," poor Barbara finally decided, as she tried in vain to woo slumber.

It was almost daylight by the time she finally fell asleep, and when she awoke the sun was streaming in at her window at an angle that meant nearly noon. Freda was standing at the foot of the bed, looking at her with a strangely steady gaze.

"Oh, Barbara," she burst out, "I want to ask your pardon for interfering with your company, but when I heard his voice I really couldn't stand it. I hope you're not very, very angry

with me. I am only a silly little girl, and the next time he comes I'll let you lock me in my room."

"Come here and kiss me good morning, pet," cried Barbara, with a burst of sisterly affection. "Don't talk nonsense."

But nonsense or not, Freda's sister was still enabled to play her rôle in "Tangled Threads" with realistic force.

XXII.

THE CELEBRATION SUPPER.

"MISS BRANDON," Mr. Davies said to Barbara one night, "you are doing splendidly. And, by the way, don't forget that we are counting on you for the supper party on the stage that celebrates our hundredth performance next Monday."

Barbara knew that the first half of this speech was inspired by the desire to obliterate her memory of the note the Forrest's manager had once written her in regard to the falling off in her acting. She was grateful for the peace of mind this thoughtfulness gave her, but somewhat disturbed about that supper. She knew that it would in all likelihood last into the small hours of the morning, and she had no mind to go home by herself after one o'clock. Nor even had she felt free to ask Thurwell to come for her, could she have done so, not knowing when to tell him to arrive.

But a solution of the difficulty was to come from an unexpected source. On this same evening Farrington stepped over to her as they were waiting for their cues in the third act.

"In regard to the celebration supper next Monday, Miss Brandon," he began, "the management has provided a carriage for Mrs. Barnes, Miss Drown, and yourself, and to me has been assigned the honor of being escort. This is satisfactory to you, I trust, although, as age comes before beauty, Mrs. Barnes must be set down first."

"It is very kind both of you and the management, Mr. Farrington," Barbara replied, adding: "This will be my first supper since I have taken up the stage. It is against my rules, you know——"

"To go out to supper," interposed the leading man. "But this is a case of staying in, you see—altogether different."

"Who told you suppers were against my rules?" asked Barbara quickly.

"Why, you just told me yourself."

"But you seemed to know all about it, any way. I could tell by the way you looked."

"Well?" and there was a twinkle in Farrington's eye.

"Well, something besides eating and drinking goes on at the Players', I am sure."

"Perhaps I'll tell you all about it, and something else more important arising therefrom, during the drive home on Monday."

He hurried on the stage, and Barbara looked

after him, confident that Deering had been talking about her at his club. She still liked Farrington. He was frank, good natured, and always gentlemanly, and had never pestered her with attentions. Now she wondered many times what could be that something important arising from Deering's chatter that he was to tell her on Monday. It added considerably to the interest with which she looked forward to the supper.

This would mark her first participation in any of the social functions of the profession. She had never been to call on any of her sister players, nor invited them to call on her, and she had refused to join the women's clubs connected with the stage. But the supper she felt she could not very well slight. Mr. Davies had been exceedingly kind to her, and her absence, unless she had a very good reason, would be noticeable. Some of the prominent players from other companies were to be among the guests, and one or two of the dramatic critics.

For one thing, she told herself, it would divert her thoughts from Thurwell and Freda. The latter evidently expected he would call the following Sunday, but he did not appear. Barbara did not know whether to be glad or sorry, and mean time welcomed the excitement of the supper as an escape from brooding over the matter.

The ladies of the "Tangled Threads" cast

were to retain the gowns worn in the last act, which were handsome ones, and when the curtain rose, after the audience had dispersed, the table, brilliantly decked with flowers, was revealed in the center of the last "setting," and the company marched in to the music of the orchestra.

Mr. Davies was escort to Miss Drown, and Barbara was assigned to Farrington and seated next to him at table.

"Don't forget what you promised to tell me tonight," she reminded him, over the oysters.

"No fear of that. It is a matter of too great importance to myself—in a business way."

"Now, you *do* mystify me."

"That's what we men like to do, but I suppose we must be good now and listen to old Britton. He's the dramatic man on the *Courier*, and imagines all his utterances are pearls of wisdom. And it behooves us to be attentive, or we may be impaled next first night that comes around."

"Yes, sir," Britton was saying in response to some remark of Mr. Davies, "criticism is the player's stepping stone to higher things. I know it has become the fashion to ignore it, to laugh at its keen thrusts, to set down its praise to flattery and its blame to the venting of personal spite, but who shall say that this is not the reason why the stage today has no players who

rank with Booth, Forrest, Kean, and Garrick of a former generation?"

Tibbals, who played a man servant in "Tangled Threads," rapped his glass with his knife and cried feebly, "Hear! hear!" but the rest of the company were silent. It seemed little else than an insult to have a man who was eating their bread tell them that they could never hope to be famous.

Suddenly Amy Drown spoke up.

"While we are on the subject of criticism," she said, "I want to tell an incident I saw with my own eyes last winter while I was out of the bill and able to go to other houses. It was at Froley's, and just across the aisle sat the critic of a well known weekly. He happened to be alone, and I noticed that he was making himself very much at home in his orchestra chair. Finally I discovered the reason. He was sound asleep."

A laugh went round, and Mr. Britton hastened to remark:

"A proper rebuke to a stupid play."

"But the play wasn't stupid," Miss Drown retorted, "and the gentleman was not *sent* to sleep, as I happen to know, but sank into that state from sheer weariness, induced by a succession of late hours. If that is the sort of judgment bar before which we are to present our-

selves, Heaven preserve us from criticism, say I."

Barbara was intensely interested in all this. There was a glow to her cheek and a sparkle to her eye which were not brought there by the wine that was served in generous measure, for of this she drank not.

Towards the end of the supper there were toasts and responses by Mr. Davies, Mr. Britton, Mr. Burley, and finally Mr. Farrington, who spoke for "The Leading Man."

"What he needs most," he said, among other things, "is a broader outlook. He should mingle more freely with men and women of all callings, and not confine himself so closely to associating with members of his own profession. The actor is the most clannish of mortals, and no man's work suffers by it more than his."

"There was a lot of good sense in your remarks, Mr. Farrington," Barbara told him, under cover of the general talk that followed the toasts.

"Well, perhaps," he replied, with a laugh. "But it was all directed at the gallery. When you come to analyze the thing it's pure nonsense telling players to mingle more in society, when society shuts them out."

"Then you admit that fact?" exclaimed Barbara eagerly.

"Certainly I do, not being blind. I know

there's a lot of talk nowadays about stage folk being received more freely than was the case some years ago, but when you come to investigate you will find that we are tolerated for the prestige our reputation may carry with it, nothing more."

"I suppose we all tacitly admit this state of things by changing our names when we enter the profession," observed Barbara thoughtfully.

"Precisely, and that is why we stick together so faithfully—because there's nowhere else to stick. And frankly, I can't say that I altogether blame the world. We are a set of irresponsible beings, made so from the very nature of our work. Existing so much in an atmosphere of forced excitement tends to make us regard all ties loosely, from marriage to an engagement for dinner."

"Ah, Don, don't say that," interposed Amy Drown, turning toward him quickly. "I'm sure it isn't true of you, nor I hope of most of us, and if the world should hear you speak so, even in jest, it would be too ready to blazon it abroad as earnest."

The signal was now given to rise from the table. There were three cheers and a tiger for "Tangled Threads," and then a hurried departure, for it was well past two o'clock.

Mrs. Barnes was set down first, then Miss

Drown, who lived not far away, leaving Barbara and Mr. Farrington together for the drive to the Van Dyke home.

"Now, I'll tell you," exclaimed Farrington, as he settled himself comfortably on the rear seat beside his companion. "I dare say you've guessed that Deering has been talking about you? Oh, nothing offensive, I assure you. But he dropped enough to let me know that you carried yourself with a high and mighty air over at Froley's."

"Well, I flatter myself I did," answered Barbara, her lips set firmly at the mere recollection of what she had gone through there. "But how on earth did all this inspire you with an idea?"

"That's what I'm coming to. He said, among other things, that some of the girls call you the born aristocrat, and as soon as he spoke, the words stamped themselves on my mind as a capital name for a play. In short, I've mapped the plot, and got half way through the dialogue, and now I want your consent to play the leading part."

XXIII.

A COWARDLY ATTACK.

BARBARA would not have been as much amazed had Farrington asked her to marry him.

"You are writing a play!" she exclaimed.

"Certainly. Why, does that so greatly astonish you? Really, Miss Brandon, you are very rough on a fellow's intellectual attainments."

"I beg your pardon, but I thought——"

"You thought, I suppose, that only the literary fellows had brains enough to knock together an evening's entertainment. But nowadays it doesn't take brains as much as kuack to build a play that will 'go.' You'll find that a greater and greater proportion of successful ones are the product of actors, or of men or women who have had much to do with the stage in one form or another. But come, what do you say to my proposition as regards yourself?"

"That is a question for Mr. Davies, it seems to me. I'm under contract to him, you know."

"Oh, that's all right. So am I. He knows all about it; he's read the scenario of my play

and is going to manage it himself. You see, I don't propose to bring it out till our season here ends. What chiefly concerns me is whether you have any sensitiveness about the way in which I came by the title."

"None in the least. I'm not thin skinned in that direction. But, of course, I can't say about taking the principal rôle till I am better acquainted with it."

"I'll come and read the scenario to you, and some of the dialogue, any time you say."

"Suppose we set Thursday afternoon, then, at three o'clock."

"Very good; I'll be there. But, hello, what's all this row about?"

Turning a corner suddenly, they found the course of the cab checked by a surging mob of people, filling the street from curb to curb watching the burning of a building. The flames lit up the scene like day, and as the driver backed his vehicle around, Barbara gave a half suppressed gasp. There, standing in the throng, was a man she knew, who had looked straight into the carriage and recognized both her and her companion.

It was Mr. Deering. Farrington laughed.

"Talk of angels and you will hear the flutter of their wings," he quoted. "Or, perhaps you would prefer the other version, Miss Brandon, as

I imagine there is not much love lost between you and Deering."

Barbara made no reply. She was excessively annoyed at the contretemps, and at the same time chagrined with herself for being vexed. What was Deering or his opinions to her? She had a perfect right to refuse the escort of one actor and accept that of another. Nevertheless, she was not at ease as she remembered what Deering *might* say, and whatever this was would seem to be confirmed when it became known that she was to play the leading rôle in a play by Donald Farrington.

"But I will be independent," she told herself. "I am doing nothing of which I am ashamed."

She began to talk to Farrington about the piece, and when he left her reminded him that she would expect him on Thursday. Then, when she had reached her own room, she recollected about Freda. Ought she to bring an actor into the home with her sister?

"But if he is not fit to meet her he is not fit for me to associate with," she argued.

Nevertheless, she found herself hoping that Freda would be out on Thursday afternoon. As it happened, however, it was she who opened the door in response to Farrington's ring. She rushed into Barbara's room in great excitement with his card.

"Oh, sister," she exclaimed, "it's your leading man, the first real actor I ever spoke to in my life! Isn't he nice? And almost as handsome as Mr. Thurwell? Did you know he was coming today?"

"Yes. He has called on business, and I want you to see that we are not disturbed."

"Then, you're not going to take me in and introduce me?"

"Certainly not. He is almost old enough to be your father."

"He doesn't look it, and I'm sure he wouldn't think it very nice of you to say that."

"I never knew you had a sister, Miss Brandon," was Farrington's greeting. "What a charming little girl she is. The very ideal for a part in our play."

Barbara lifted her hand in protest.

"Freda is not on the stage, Mr. Farrington," she said. "Pray don't say anything further on the matter."

"But I must. My instincts in scenting a 'find' forbid me to keep silent. Really, now, you must let me persuade you."

Barbara drew herself up stiffly.

"I thought you came here, Mr. Farrington, to talk about *your* play, not about *my* sister."

"Pardon me. I believe I did, but when *your* sister seems as though she were just ready to step

into a certain part in *my* play, I may well be pardoned for the digression."

He drew a manuscript from his pocket, and for the next half hour or so Barbara forgot everything else in listening to the unfolding of as clever a plot as she had ever seen exploited. She was outspoken, almost enthusiastic in her praise of it, and Farrington was as pleased as a boy, or at least he showed that he was, in the same frank, unrestrained way.

"You see I had this advantage, Miss Brandon," he explained. "I knew that you could sing, and I am somewhat musical myself, so I worked the songs in in what I flatter myself is a perfectly natural manner. So, while it is a straight comedy, you get the music not only as a surprise, but as one that does not jar the fitness of things."

He stayed until dusk warned him that he must depart, but he went with Barbara's consent to be his heroine.

"I may come again soon, may I?" he asked her that evening at the theater. "We can get lots of points from each other, you know, and then, I tell you frankly, there is an unprofessional atmosphere about your home that is absolutely refreshing."

Barbara gave him leave to come as often as he liked. She was intensely interested in the play,

which, in a sense, had been named for her, and delighted in talking it over. But when she opened her mail Saturday evening at the theater, she misdoubted whether she had not better forbid Farrington the house.

Among her letters was a paper with an item marked in blue pencil, under the head of "Gossip as it Flies," that caused her cheeks to burn as they had not burned since those memorable experiences at Froley's. This was the paragraph :

The advent into professionalism of some graduates from the amateur stage does not tend to raise the standard of stage morals. A certain young lady, whose real name is rather a high sounding one, put on great airs when she first intruded behind the scenes of one of our city theaters last autumn. She fancied that a mere look from any male member of the company was a criminal offense, and actually insulted a man who had shown her every kindness because he offered her a simple courtesy. Passing to another house, she has so far overcome any scruples of this kind as to ride about the city at three in the morning with a certain handsome actor belonging to the same company. All of which goes to show that the honor of these aristocrats is not so much a matter of morals as of personal preference.

"Coward!" was the word that forced itself through Barbara's lips, as she flung the paper from her.

As it fell to the floor she noticed the name of it—*Daily Telephone*.

"It's a conspiracy, then. What am I to do? Oh, how helpless a woman is!"

The veins in her forehead swelled, her hands clenched themselves.

"I must leave here at once. I must go away, out of New York."

Then came the thought of her mother and Freda. No, she must stay where she could provide for them, she must endure everything in the consciousness of innocence. She picked up the paper and tore it into small bits, trying to comfort herself with the reflection that no one would know who was intended but the victims and the conspirators themselves.

"But I must keep Mr. Farrington from coming to see me," she told herself, and resolved to speak to him that very night.

Still, it was a difficult matter to approach, and before she could decide just how to do it, the play was over, and he had gone off with a friend.

And the next afternoon he called again.

It was Sunday, and she was sitting in the parlor with Thurwell. She had hailed the latter's advent as a haven of refuge in a sea of troubles. He was something so apart from her present life of alternate high hope and deep despair; he seemed somehow to be typical of the breezy healthfulness of that Adirondack region where she had first met him.

So glad was she to see him, and so fagged with the worry that paragraph in the paper had caused

her, that she welcomed him more effusively than perhaps she herself realized. At any rate, he realized it, and rejoiced accordingly.

"How goes the work?" he began, when they had seated themselves.

"If it was only the work, I should have little to complain of," answered Barbara, almost impelled to tell him all.

"Why, what's gone wrong elsewhere?" he wanted to know, solicitously. "Can I help you?"

"Oh, no, no," she cried, now frightened at what she had already said. "It's only—only the annoyances that seem to be inseparable from being a public character such as I am."

"Don't speak in that way, Miss Van Dyke. You are not a public character. You would be very much offended if any one else called you such."

"If he only knew what they have called me!" thought poor Barbara bitterly.

"We people of the stage are all public characters in a sense," she said. "We are to the people what the court fools were to the kings of olden time—their means of entertainment."

"You are bitter today, Bar——"

Thurwell caught himself in the middle of the word. It would have been the first time he had ever called her by her first name. And just then the door bell rang.

XXIV.

UNEXPECTED CALLERS.

"I'LL go, sister."

Freda suddenly appeared in the hallway, and, with a bright nod to Thurwell, opened the door. Farrington entered—big, handsome, smiling. Barbara started to introduce him to Thurwell and turned to find the latter shaking hands with Freda, so she was obliged to include both in the presentation.

Farrington at once began to talk to Freda, evidently with the intention of letting it be understood that he was conscious of having interrupted a tête-à-tête between Barbara and her friend. Thurwell, of course, recognized the leading man of the Forrest at once. Barbara thought she detected surprise in his glance, and hastily whispered: "He's writing a play around me."

Then she could have bitten her tongue out, as she recalled the French proverb, "*Qui s'excuse, s'accuse.*"

Thurwell simply elevated his eyebrows and hadn't a word to say. Meantime Freda was chatting away volubly to Farrington.

"You are the first real actor I have ever met," she said, with the frankness of youth.

"Fie, Miss Freda, you are not at all complimentary to your sister!"

"Oh, she doesn't count, because I knew her before she went on the stage. What an entrancing life it must be! I'm perfectly wild to go on myself."

"And I was wild to have you for the new play I'm writing for your sister. But she wouldn't listen to the suggestion."

Freda clasped her hands in ecstasy.

"Oh, Mr. Farrington, do you think I could? You know I've never even been an amateur, and Barbara acted lots that way before she got an engagement."

"Of course you could. It's a very peculiar rôle. The girl I have in mind hasn't a thing to say; she only smiles. And you do that to perfection."

"Now, I'll think you don't mean a word if you talk that way. But tell me more about this funny girl. Why doesn't she speak? Is she deaf and dumb?"

"No; I haven't dared to be quite as novel as that. She appears only in one scene—a fashionable afternoon reception. She's to be the type of girl who can't remember who people are and never trusts herself to do more than smile at anything that is said to her."

"And so you decided that I was just the one to fill that rôle, Mr. Farrington? But never mind, I'll forgive you if you'll only get me on."

Farrington shook his head.

"It's hopeless," he replied. "Your sister won't hear of it. Snapped me terribly short the other day because I even suggested such a thing."

"Wait till mother comes in from church, then. We'll see what she says. Honor bright, will you get me the part if I can get the permission to take it?"

"Cross my heart, as the children say."

"Good. When would I have to begin to rehearse?"

"Well, not very soon. The play isn't finished yet."

"It isn't? And I almost felt myself sniffing footlights already! But remember, I've got your promise whenever the thing is ready. But here I'm wasting my time talking to you about myself when there's lots of other things I want to ask you. And I may never have another chance."

"Why not, pray? Is your mother going to forbid me the house as soon as you ask her for that permission?"

"Oh, no; I don't mean that. But Barbara thinks I oughtn't to know actors. She's much

more particular about me than mother is. Don't you see how worried she looks whenever she glances over here?"

"No, I don't," answered Farrington bluntly. "I think she looks supremely contented. Who is it—an old friend?"

"Yes, rather. Mercy, there goes the bell! You'll have to excuse me while I go answer it."

"Let me go with you. I've always wanted to know how the thing worked at the upper end, to fly open in your face so mysteriously below."

"Come on, then. Do you mean to say you've never lived in a flat?"

"Never risen so high," was Farrington's laughing response, as he hurried off after Freda.

What Barbara thought of the proceeding he didn't care in the least. This little sister of hers captivated him as no woman of his own world had ever succeeded in doing, although many had tried.

"I wonder who it is," said Freda, as they came leisurely back through the long hall. "It can't be mother, for she has her key. There, you must step into the parlor if you don't want to be flattened against the wall when I open the door."

The bell rang sharply over his head. He dodged out of the way, and the next instant Freda gave an exclamation of complete surprise.

"Why, Mrs. Stanton!"

"And me, too," chimed in her husband, puffing and blowing from the fatigue of the ascent.

Mrs. Stanton was speechless from want of breath.

"Bring a chair for her, quick!" cried Freda to Farrington, and the leading man instantly placed one in the hallway.

"Glad to see you, my dear," said the eminent lawyer, wiping his brow with one hand and holding out the other to Freda. "You're looking as fit as a fiddle; and Barbara, you rogue, to steal a march on us all this way and masquerade on the stage under another name! But I recognized you beneath all the paint and powder, and told Maria we must show you that there are some of your friends who will not cut your acquaintance if you have put on the sock and buskin. Plague on it, we are proud of you, aren't we, Maria?"

But Mrs. Stanton had just caught sight of Thurwell.

"Why, Allan Thurwell, you truant!" she exclaimed, as he came forward. "So this is where you have been hiding all these months!"

By this time Barbara had recovered from her stupefaction at the advent of these unexpected callers, and was introducing Mr. Farrington.

" Bless my soul ! " exclaimed Mr. Stanton, in the middle of his hand shake. " This is the man in the play, Maria ; don't you remember him ? "

Mrs. Stanton peered through her lorgnette an instant, then dropped it, with the remark, " Yes, I think I do ; " adding, as she turned to Barbara, " Is your mother at home ? "

" Mother is at church, Mrs. Stanton. How are your daughters ? "

But Mrs. Stanton never heard the query. She had turned at once to Thurwell and began conversing with him in a low tone. Mr. Stanton mean time came over and seated himself on the divan beside Barbara.

" Now, my dear, " he began, " I want you to tell me all about it. How did you get on, how do you like it, and do you find it a really congenial and paying occupation ? We are all so much interested in you. I told Maria I would not let another day pass without driving over here to see you. And we had to trust to Thomas and the horses to find the way. "

Barbara wanted to take the flat of her hand and strike him in the face. With her quick intuitions she understood easily enough why they had come. He had never had the personal acquaintance of an actress, and now that she was making some little reputation in the leading play

of the season he thought it would be a neat thing to boast of at his club that he had been to see "that woman who plays the adventuress in 'Tangled Threads,' " and be able to tell just how she lived. Mrs. Stanton's presence was accounted for by the fact that he did not dare come alone.

Barbara tingled with indignation to the ends of her fingers. Her impulse was to show these people the door, but it was her own home and she must not repay rudeness in kind.

"I am sensible of the distinction you have conferred upon us, Mr. Stanton," she said, "in coming all this distance to pay your respects. Your intention is appreciated, I assure you."

"You're right in with them, I see, Barbara," Mr. Stanton went on, with a nod of his head toward Farrington, in lively converse with Freda on the other side of the room. "He's pretty nice sort, isn't he?"

"He is a gentleman," answered Barbara sententially.

She felt as if she must choke if these people did not leave the room. Mr. Stanton's eyes were roving about restlessly, as though searching for a ballet dancer concealed beneath the table cover, or another man hiding behind the portières. Mrs. Stanton, she felt sure, was talking about her to Allan Thurwell. Indeed, in

the pause that now fell, she distinctly heard the lady say one word that made her certain of it. That one word was "tights."

She wanted to scream out and say it was false, that she never wore them. She bit her lip hard to keep the utterance back, and sat there rigid, watching how uncomfortable Mr. Stanton grew in this frigid atmosphere. This old friend who had turned actress would not talk about herself; there was no other subject on which he wished to converse with her; plainly it was time to be going.

"Come, my dear," he said, turning to his wife. "I think we had best leave our respects for Mrs. Van Dyke. She may come in too late for us to see her. Good afternoon, Barbara."

She managed to look past his proffered hand as she bowed her adieux.

"Come, Mr. Thurwell," said Mrs. Stanton. "Were you not going? We shall be happy to put you down wherever you say."

"Thank you, Mrs. Stanton, but I am not leaving yet."

Barbara's eyes beamed as he said that, but Mrs. Stanton turned away without another glance at him.

"Your arm, Edward," she cried. "It is so dark I can't see a step before me."

"If we only had the trick staircase of the old

time minstrels we'd save her the trouble of walking down," Farrington whispered to Freda as he closed the door after them. "Did you see her give me the frozen hand?" he added, turning to Barbara.

"She was actually insulting!" exclaimed the latter. "So was he. They only came here to see if I had turned into a mountebank because I had gone on the stage. I'm thankful mother wasn't home. I'm afraid she would have been too polite to them."

"I was inclined to kick old Stanton down stairs," remarked Thurwell quietly.

"Come, I'll join you. I think he hasn't reached the bottom yet;" and in the laugh that greeted this suggestion from Farrington all restraint vanished, and the four became to one another as old friends.

XXV.

THE LAST PROP GONE.

"SAVE us!" cried Barbara suddenly. "I hear voices on the stairs. I hope mother hasn't met them and persuaded them to come back."

"No fear of that," laughed Thurwell. "A burnt child dreads the fire."

"Fire!" exclaimed Farrington. "There wasn't enough warmth in the welcome they got to start a penny rush a burning."

"Good!" broke in Barbara. "I'm glad I made my feelings so apparent. The idea of their having the effrontery to come snooping here just because I have turned actress! As though that made me an object of curiosity—like a two headed calf or a leopard that's striped instead of spotted."

"But that's what we all have to take, Miss Brandon," rejoined Farrington. "One would think that we were made of different clay from other folk. They seem to think we haven't any feelings except those we put into the parts we play."

"Well, I've learned one thing by this afternoon's episode," announced Barbara.

"And what is that?" demanded the three in concert, as she paused.

"I'm not skilled enough as a circus rider to straddle two horses, especially when they are both going opposite ways. I've tried to be in the world of the theater and yet not of it. It's no use. I'm branded, so I might as well acknowledge the mark and be proud of it. Such people as the Stantons make one ashamed of ever having belonged to society."

"Hear, hear!" cried Farrington, waving his handkerchief, and only restrained from leaping on a chair by Freda, who held him laughingly by the arm.

And at this instant the door opened to admit Mrs. Van Dyke. Barbara went up to her at once, and brought her into the center of the parlor.

"You needn't be shocked, mother," she said. "This is Mr. Farrington, our leading man at the theater. I am sure you two will be very good friends. He was just celebrating my declaration of independence of the swaddling clothes of society."

Mrs. Van Dyke held out her hand to Farrington, but looked bewildered, as well she might.

"Now, sit down comfortably for a minute, and I'll tell you all about it," went on Barbara, pressing her mother back into the easiest chair

in the room, while Freda removed her hat and cloak. "Mr. and Mrs. Stanton have just been here. He recognized me on the stage and came around to see if I'd grown horns or sprouted a cloven hoof."

"Barbara!" exclaimed Mrs. Van Dyke, looking shocked.

"It's just as I tell you. I leave it to these gentlemen if Mr. Stanton did not fairly ogle me?"

"He was patronizing to an insufferable degree," answered Thurwell. "I do not blame your daughter for feeling annoyed."

"I'll put him into our play, by Jove, I will, Miss Brandon!" exclaimed Farrington, with sudden inspiration.

Whereupon Barbara took them all into her confidence about the new piece, Farrington put in his plea for Freda's services, Freda added a strong one for herself by reminding her mother that then Barbara need never come home from the theater alone, and there was so much talking over of things to be done that both men were induced to remain to tea, which was the jolliest meal ever eaten in that flat.

Afterwards Farrington sang for them, and Barbara caught her mother wiping the tears from her cheeks. Then she looked at Freda, and she knew that the child's girlish fancy for Thurwell

was fast fading into a stronger sentiment for a man whose sterling worth she could not but admit, if he was in the ranks of those whom "society" considered without the pale.

"He is old enough to be her father, too," Barbara mused; "but what of that, if they are really going to love each other?"

Then she turned to look at Thurwell, and found him looking at her, and at once cast her glance to the floor in dire confusion, more abashed by this loved one's gaze than she was by the scores of opera glasses leveled at her every night in the week.

But when both the men had gone, and she was shut in her room, with freedom to calmly review the past few hours' happenings, she suddenly recognized a serious phase of the new development. Whence now would come her inspiration for her part in "Tangled Threads"? The bitterness in her own cup had been drained off. She knew that Thurwell loved her, and would ask her to be his wife as soon as he felt he had a right to do so. And Freda was happy, she knew, in the thought of Farrington.

"I have reached my Waterloo this time for certain," she said to herself. "There are no longer any changes I can ring. I might as well go to Mr. Davies in the morning and admit that all this time I have been a whited sepulcher,

playing a rôle, not through genius for it, but by a plain 'fake,' if you can call using real feelings for sham ones a fake. It's either that or ask him for Miss Drown's part."

But she was not quite at the end of her rope yet. Suddenly she recalled Deering and his dastardly attack on her in the *Telephone*, and she knew she was saved. At every thought of him her heart swelled with indignation, and as long as he lived she made sure she could summon up vindictive characteristics on short notice.

"It is my friend the enemy indeed," she told herself, with a smile.

Matters went on smoothly for a couple of weeks after this. Although the source of her inspiration was changed for the third time, Barbara continued to play *Lady Bingham* to the satisfaction of her manager and the public. And yet, at times, she could not but regard herself as a fraud.

"This is not acting," she told herself. "It is only a piece of my own personal life fitted into the play. And some day I am sure it will be found out and I be voted what I sometimes feel myself—'a fakir.'"

But the crisis came in a way entirely unsuspected. One Monday night she noticed that Farrington was unwontedly grave, and that his acting was not up to the usual mark. He looked

at her, too, rather strangely, and once or twice seemed to make up his mind to tell her something, and then as suddenly changed it again.

But when her work was over for the night, he came up to her in the wings and said in a serious tone: "I did not like to tell you before, because, even though you may have no pleasant recollections of the man, the mere fact that you knew him is going to make the news about him more or less of a shock."

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed, looking up in quick alarm. "Who——"

"Deering. He shot himself this afternoon at his hotel."

Barbara gave a little cry and put out her hand as if to ward off a blow.

"I knew it would upset you, so I waited till now to tell you. You would see it in the papers in the morning."

"Was—was there any particular reason assigned for his act?" Barbara faltered.

"None. There is not a shred of explanation. The report of the pistol was heard in the hotel, they burst in the door, and Deering was found on the bed, the revolver in his hand."

"But who saw him last alive?" Barbara asked.

"Some friends with whom he had dined late last night at the Lambs'. They say they left

him in the best of spirits at his hotel. I haven't been so shocked in a good while, and I'm afraid my work suffered tonight."

The words sent a chill to Barbara's heart. Where was she to find her inspiration now? *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*. Fate appeared to be upon her track with grim persistency.

She slept but little that night, and was wretchedly nervous all the next day. Thurwell now took her to the theater and came for her regularly. On this evening she said to him:

"I am going to fail tonight, Allan, and if I do I resign in the morning."

She would give him no further explanation.

"I will go around in front and seek to give you the inspiration of my presence," he suggested.

"No, no," she protested. "That would only make matters worse. I'll tell you whether my presentiment comes true when I see you again at eleven. Good by till then."

She was so nervous when she went on the stage that Farrington noticed the trembling of her hand and spoke of it.

"Are you ill?" he interpolated, in one of his asides.

"No," she answered, "but I am sure I shall never act this part again."

She knew the crucial point would come in the third act. And her forebodings were fully

verified. She failed utterly to strike the note of sincerity in her display of emotion. One who saw her for the first time in the rôle would have said that it was utterly beyond her scope. There was some perfunctory applause on her exit, but she knew it was inspired by pity, not admiration.

She sent for Mr. Davies as soon as she reached her dressing room. He came quickly, concern in his face.

"I must resign, Mr. Davies," Barbara began at once. "I can no longer play this part with justice to you or myself. Any one who saw me will tell you I failed tonight, and I shall fail every night hereafter. I know the reason, but it is scarcely worth while to state it, as it is nothing that you or any one about the theater can remedy. If you have any other part you are willing to let me try, I will attempt it, but *Lady Bingham* I shall never act again."

If it had not been for the previous defection the manager would have protested. As a good business man he could do no more than accept the resignation and express his regrets.

The future looked black, indeed, just as it had begun to assume a brighter tinge. Her pay would stop, and Farrington would probably not want such a chameleon for his new play. Barbara felt like a criminal as she thought of the news she must carry home.

XXVI.

"A BORN ARISTOCRAT."

BARBARA had been out of the cast of "Tangled Threads" three weeks. One of the regular understudies at the theater took her place, but did not give entire satisfaction. Amy Drown called twice at the flat, and endeavored to persuade Barbara to return. Farrington was utterly nonplussed. The worst of it was that Barbara could not very well explain her action. To do so amounted to confessing that she was no artist. And a reëngagement for her was a matter of supreme importance to the family.

Their little hoard was steadily dwindling. There was now not even Freda's pittance of four dollars to incite a feeble current in the opposite direction. Even at home, the only reason for her resignation Barbara gave was that her work had so deteriorated she could see for herself that it was no longer satisfactory to the public.

She felt like a criminal as she gazed into the anxious faces of mother and sister, when each day she returned from the weary round of managers' offices and agents' bureaus with the same

report of "Nothing in sight yet." For these people now looked at her askance. Here was a woman who had twice left a successfully running play apparently without any good and sufficient reason. She must be a difficult person to get along with; they ought to take warning and beware.

Once there came to her a proposition from a music hall, the manager of which had somehow contrived to find out her real name. He offered to advertise her well as a society woman in vaudeville, but Barbara spurned the suggestion as she would have thrown a snake from her gown had she chanced to see one climbing there.

Thurwell suffered the agonies of one compelled to witness the tortures of those dear to him without the ability to relieve them. He was engaged to Barbara, but his salary was not large, although better things were promised, and it would be out of the question to support four on it.

"I shall get something soon," Barbara would say to him, and the one consolation they derived from the situation was that i gave them the evenings to be with each other.

Meantime Farrington was working hard on his play, consulting Barbara constantly about it, and on each visit contriving to see Freda. He declared that he no longer took any interest in his work in "Tangled Threads," being obliged to

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play with such a "stick," as he irreverently termed the substitute.

"And for a fact," he added, "the audiences are falling off."

Barbara was feeling especially blue on this particular morning.

"I verily believe," she said to herself, "that I could play *Lady Bingham* again, inspired by the indigo hue of our prospects."

Farrington's ring was heard, and Freda flew to open the door. But for once he did not linger with her in the hall. He burst into the little parlor with the exuberance of a boy.

"Great news!" he cried. "Freda here must think up a stage name at once. 'A Born Aristocrat' goes into rehearsal tomorrow. Davies wants to bring it out in a couple of weeks. So no more idle time on your hands after today."

Barbara's face lighted up, but a line of perplexity creased her forehead.

"I don't understand," she said. "I thought 'Tangled Threads' was to run out the regular season, and your play be put on in May. Here it is scarcely March."

"But, my dear Barbara, it's caprice, the caprice of the fickle public, that manages the whole theatrical business for you. I told you our audiences were falling off. The governor has caught on and means to make a sudden shift."

"What's to become of the company, though?"

"Goes to Chicago; all, of course, except your humble servant, who never will be missed. Isn't it glorious to have our play brought out in the middle of the season instead of at the fag end of it?"

"*Our* play?" repeated Barbara questioningly.

"Of course *our*. Do you suppose I would ever have written it if I hadn't known you? And then, think how much I owe to the advent of our friends the Stantons here that afternoon! Ah, that's a scene which will make talk. And if you can get a play talked about you're all right in the box office. I've stipulated that you are to get a cool hundred a week, and Freda is good for twenty five."

"'From poverty to affluence,'" quoted Barbara, with a happy sigh that let slip the burden of anxious worry she had borne so long.

"The extent of the affluence will depend on the public's reception of the piece," Farrington warned her. "Davies tells me it's of the sort to be either an immense hit or a frightful failure. It's touch and go, he says, whether society will enjoy seeing itself held up to scorn, but he is willing to risk the experiment."

Freda was wild with delight, but at the preliminary rehearsal next morning had such a fit

of stage fright that it was really pitiable to see her.

"Never mind," Farrington insisted. "That's a splendid sign. You'll make a greater actress than your sister yet, because your heart's in it, and hers isn't."

Advance notices of the new play began to appear in all the papers. Just enough of the plot was told to whet the curiosity of the public, particularly that of the fashionable set which frequented the Forrest. Again, the name of Donald Farrington as author was sufficient to insure a big audience for the first night.

But as this approached, Farrington himself began to grow frightfully nervous. The perfected work from the repeated rehearsals caused the satire on society functions and on society itself to stand forth in bold outline that seemed to cry: "They'll be insulted rather than amused." But to tone down meant to destroy the entire fabric, and Farrington was fain to await, with what equanimity he could muster, the verdict of the public.

Although he said nothing of his state of mind, Barbara was quick to apprehend it, and became correspondingly anxious. Success meant much to her—meant, in fact, a shelter and food; peace of mind as against gnawing worry. With this hanging on the outcome of a three hours' per-

formance, it is small wonder that she looked upon hers as the most nerve wrecking profession of them all.

The fateful night arrived. It had teemed rain all day, and was pouring harder than ever when darkness closed in. In spite of herself Barbara could not throw off a depression of spirits which kept her mood in sympathy with the weeping skies.

Thurwell was to be with Mrs. Van Dyke in front, and as the four plodded through the puddles to the theater, the heroine of the evening's play wished that every stage struck girl could for one instant change places with her and learn the difference between the sordidness of fact and the glitter of fancy.

"It's a shame it should be such a horrid night for my *début*," lamented Freda, when Farrington called at their dressing room just after the curtain had rung up.

"A fig for the elements," he replied. "We've got the bumper house of the season."

A few minutes later the play was stopped for half a minute by the long continued applause that greeted the author of it. Barbara made her entrance shortly afterwards, and she, too, received a royal welcome.

It was no trouble for her to play this part; there was no danger of losing the source of in-

spiration. It was all comedy of the satirical sort, and as point after point was scored the house rang with mirth. The songs, coming as they did, as a surprise, were a big go, especially the duet she and Farrington sang, while the guests seized the opportunity to chatter away like magpies, applauding vociferously a performance to which they had paid not the least attention.

The five o'clock tea scene was another hit, Freda's simpering smiles coming in for a special recognition. But the test episode was that of the call of fashion on folly, as the house bill phrased it, an incident elaborated directly from the one Farrington had witnessed that Sunday afternoon at the Van Dyke flat. Society was unmercifully scored—up to date society, not the lords and ladies of a past age, but the snobs and parvenus of Fifth and Madison Avenues, Seventy Second Street and the Riverside Drive. Farrington drove his shafts deep, and turned them in the wounds he made. One could almost hear the audience gasp as with a single throat at the audacity of the thing.

The actors played the scene well, and not once were they interrupted by applause. When fashion was routed and so called folly flaunted its flags of triumph, the curtain fell amid dead silence. Then, as the fringe of it touched the boards, the public appeared to awaken from the

daze into which it had been thrown, and there came that thunder of handclapping which is a delight to the player's soul.

The company bowed its acknowledgments twice, then Farrington and Barba^{ra} appeared, and finally, in response to calls for "Author, author!" Farrington alone, who shook his head vigorously in response to cries of "Speech! Speech!" and retreated precipitately to his dressing room.

The last act went off brilliantly, and nobody rose till the tag was spoken.

"It's a big go with the people," Farrington whispered to Barbara, as the curtain hid them from the footlights. "So that"—with a snap of the fingers—"for the critics."

XXVII.

THE CRITICS, THE PUBLIC, AND THE PLAYERS.

IN spite of Farrington's assertion that he didn't care a fig for the critics, he made an appointment to breakfast with the Van Dykes the next morning at ten, bringing all the papers with him. All agreed not to look at any of the notices until they should be read aloud at the table. Poor Freda scarcely slept a wink for worrying about them. And after all, not one of the reviewers mentioned her. They all found so much to say about the play that they had space to mention only the leading players.

"We'll go through them in alphabetical order," said Farrington, as he picked the *Courier* from the pile on the chair beside him.

" 'Society Scored at the Forrest.' Whew! Britton has caught our satire easily enough. But he's not forgotten how well his paper stands in the boudoirs and libraries of the smart set. Listen to this tirade :

'No such insult has been offered to respectable folk in the history of the modern stage. The people composing the better part of the city's population are actually vilified under

a thin disguise of satire, and we cannot understand how Mr. Davies, whose theater is supported by the very class this play denounces, could have lent himself to such a shameless exhibition.'

"How is that, girls?" cried Farrington joyously, waving the paper above his head. "That means a hundred night run sure."

"But what does he say about you and Barbara?" Freda broke in, leaning forward breathlessly.

"And your smiles? Not a blessed thing about any of us. And now for the *Guardian* and Eric Vane."

Farrington smacked his lips, leaned comfortably back in his chair and began again:

"Tell a man that you saw an article in a certain paper saying all manner of evil things against the church or club or regiment to which he belongs, and he is far more apt to ransack the news stands for a copy than if the article had scored an organization for which he cared not a button. 'A Born Aristocrat' literally wipes the floor with metropolitan society as it is. According to this play fashionable folk are most unconscionable liars, would take the palm from the Pharisees of old for hypocrisy, and as for brains, don't know enough to go in the house when the storm signals are flying. Hence it is no rash prophecy to predict that the Forrest will be crowded for months to come by the fashion of Gotham, anxious to see itself held up to ridicule in the mirror constructed by folly—in the person of Donald Farrington, leading man of the theater, and who has now turned playwright. He will be able to retire from the stage on the profits of the piece—if he is not, in the mean time, retired to the accident ward of Bellevue to recover from the chastisement inflicted by some irate Knickerbocker with a Van tail to the front of his name.

"Miss Violet Brandon enacts the name part. She is as coldly beautiful as she was a few months ago in 'The Summer Girl' at Froleys, but plays with about as much vim as a cow. I know my women readers will say: 'What a shame for Mr. Vane to speak that way about such a beautiful creature!' But then the Forrest is a playhouse, not a dime museum, and this humble scribe is paid to criticise acting, not looks."

Farrington dropped the paper when he had finished, and looked across at Barbara to see how she took this "roast."

She smiled back at him.

"That's all right," she said. "I understand perfectly that Mr. Vane earns his bread by saying mean things about people. He doesn't necessarily believe them himself; he thinks them up simply to make spicy reading. And I believe the public are now beginning to take them at their true worth. What does the *Transcript* say?"

"Puts us all on the gridiron—author, actors, and manager. Oh, these notices are fruit from the box office end!"

Farrington was correct here. Society began to besiege the Forrest for seats, and during the first week the record for even "Tangled Threads" was eclipsed.

But there was very little applause; it was quite evident the audiences were the outcome of curiosity rather than admiration. Both Farrington and Mr. Davies, however, were perfectly satisfied. Freda alone was disheartened.

"If some of the critics had even said I was bad," she lamented, "it would show they had seen me."

She soon tired of the novelty of the thing, and told Farrington if they could get anybody else to take her place she would prefer to see the play from the front.

"This waiting around between appearances is too stupid business," she explained. "With box scenes you can only get a provoking glimpse of what is going on on the stage, and to poke around behind, staring at the wrong side of things, while you can hear the audience enjoying itself in comfortable orchestra chairs, becomes rather cloying after a time."

"I wish your experience could be blazoned abroad, pet," rejoined her sister, "for the benefit of all stage struck maidens. When you add to this the drudgery of rehearsals, there is a great deal of shell to mighty little meat."

Barbara made no secret of the fact that the theater was to her merely a means to an end. And this was due to other causes than the knowledge that Thurwell hated to have her on the boards. Her present environment was as pleasant as could be. The company was a small one, and all its members were congenial. But the deadly monotony of the thing was what palled.

"And if we changed the bill once in two weeks it would be just as bad," she confided to Farrington, "for there would be the nightmare of rehearsals."

But the hundred dollar check handed to her every Tuesday was a substantial consolation, although this, too, had its shadowy side, as one never knew how long its weekly advent would continue. All depended on that weathercock—the public.

"But there's the road," Farrington assured her, in her moments of despondency. "Our play has been so widely discussed that Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago are all clamoring for dates."

However, there was no comfort in this for Barbara. The road would mean separation from Thurwell. And yet she felt that this would be a good thing for him. He worked hard at the office all day, and stayed up every night in the week to come to the theater at quarter past eleven to escort her home, which meant that he did not get to bed himself until long after midnight.

He was not accustomed to such a constant succession of late hours. She could see that the strain of them was beginning to tell on him. Two or three times she tried to persuade him to rest at home a night or so.

"I can take a cab," she told him, "or Don will look out for me."

But Thurwell scouted the idea that he was breaking down.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "Can I not doze in my room till my alarm clock tells me it is time to come after you without injuring my health? Here you work hard all evening long."

"I get to sleep, even so, before you do, sir, and then I'm not obliged to get up till ten, while you have to turn out at seven."

Farrington teased Freda unmercifully about leaving his company.

"But you surely won't miss me," she retorted. "I never saw anything of you. When I was off the stage you were on, and when I was on with you, you were always making love to Barbara or some of the other girls."

"Then you went away from me because you didn't have as much as you wanted of me?" he replied to this, one day. "Is that it?"

She lifted her eyes and looked straight into his face for an instant. She saw something there besides interest in the questions he had asked; something that caused her to look down towards the carpet till his fingers raised her chin and once again their eyes met.

Then there was no need for further words.

They were in each other's arms, and there was another future to discuss besides Thurwell's.

The engagement was a surprise to no one except the old friends of the Van Dykes, who held up their hands in holy horror when they heard of it.

"But my 'play actor' is true gold," Freda would say, "while I know lots of society men who are only pinchbeck."

"Good for you, Freda," cried Farrington; "those are the sentiments for the wife of the fellow who's making a fortune holding those same society folk up to ridicule. So the quicker you name the day the better."

But to this Mrs. Van Dyke would not hear at present.

XXVIII.

THE SEAMY SIDE OF SUCCESS.

THE "Born Aristocrat" had been running about two months when paragraphs began to appear in the papers to the effect that the leading woman, Violet Brandon, was an ex society girl, whom society had cast off when she took up the stage, and that this play was her revenge. Far-ington was delighted and Barbara furious.

"No chance of a slump in business now," the former exclaimed.

"If this is a fabrication of the theater's press agent," declared the latter, "I'll teach him to trespass on a woman's privacy in this shameless way."

But good an advertisement as this report was for the piece, the management could lay no claim to originating it, and Barbara was forced to conclude that the Stantons, recognizing themselves in the play, had taken this means of "getting even." And it was not long before her own name was printed in full.

She had steadily denied herself to all interviewers, and was now more rigid in her observ-

ance of this rule than ever. Hence, whoever was "giving her away" was a perfect bonanza to the newspaper people. One of the Sunday papers contained a long account of her, with pictures of her "before and after" the crash. In the one she was represented lolling back in her brougham making calls, in the other she figured in tights among the chorus.

Thurwell had blood in his eye when he saw this.

"I'm going to chase this thing down if it takes a month," he told Farrington.

But the actor laughed.

"It will only show them their nippers have pierced the flesh," he replied.

"But hang it, man," Thurwell retorted, "the thing is a libel. Barbara never wore tights in her life, and you can see the malice of the article sticking out all over it. How would you take it if it were Freda?"

"I'd be just as foolish as you are. So go in and lick 'em, my boy. But first catch your hare."

Thurwell was shrewd about this. He did not go to the newspaper office in a turbulent mood. He waited until he had sufficiently cooled, and then strolled around, sent in his card to the Sunday editor, and asked to see him for a few minutes on a matter of business.

Admitted to the presence of the man who presided over the weekly collection of horrors,

Thurwell began by saying that he had noticed yesterday's paper contained a "beat" in the way of news about the leading woman of "A Born Aristocrat."

"Now, I knew Miss Van Dyke before she went on the stage," he continued, "and if you could put me in communication with the person who wrote the article I might be able to supply some additional information which would be of interest to the public."

The editor looked up at him sharply. Thurwell exerted all his will power to keep his finger ends from grinding themselves into the palms of his hands in their itching to thrash the fellow.

"I used to act in amateur theatricals with her," he added, as an extra inducement.

The editor pricked up his ears at this. He scented another good "story." He scribbled a few lines on a card and handed it to Thurwell.

"Here is Miss Twickam's address," he said. "If you send her this with a request for an appointment she will be glad to accommodate you."

Thurwell murmured "Thanks" as he took the card and at the same time picked up his own, which lay on the editor's desk. He had no mind to furnish the paper with any extra items of gossip.

He was not surprised to find that the writer of the article was a woman, although this would

prevent his administration of the physical castigation he so longed to give.

"I'll get some sort of satisfaction, though," he assured himself.

On Thursday evening he reported at Miss Twickam's apartments, according to arrangement. She was a little woman, with rather a sweet face and a sweet toned voice that, for a moment, almost disarmed her visitor of his intentions.

"You wished to give me some more information about Violet Brandon?" she began, in a businesslike way, after they were seated. "We gave a good deal of space to Miss Brandon last Sunday, but if what you can tell me is exclusive, we should be glad to print it."

"You do not know Miss Brandon personally?" Thurwell replied.

"No; I understand that she will not be interviewed, but——"

"One moment, if you please;" and Thurwell held up his hand. "Have you seen her act?"

"Certainly."

"Have you ever seen her wear tights?"

"No; because I did not happen to be present at performances in which they were called for."

"You stated in your article last Sunday that Miss Brandon wore tights when she was with Froley. You must have had your information from some source. Can you recall what it was?"

The newspaper woman looked "mad clear through."

"I did not grant you this interview, sir," she said, "for the purpose of permitting myself to be cross questioned. I was under the impression that you came here to give me some information about Miss Brandon."

"So I have, and now inform you that she never wore tights in her life, and that the whole tone of your article was unjustifiably offensive."

"Sir," exclaimed Miss Twickam, springing to her feet, "you are insulting."

"If I am," returned Thurwell quietly, "you alone hear the insult, not fifty thousand people who read what you write in the paper. Miss Brandon is my fiancée, and I request that you write and sign a retraction of your statement in regard to the tights."

"Umph! I shall do nothing of the sort," exclaimed Miss Twickam, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Then will you state the name of the play and the character in which the tights were worn?"

"I am not called upon to do that, either," with a toss of the head.

"Or will you tell me now what the occasion was? If you do not I shall conclude that you wrote what you did without proper authority."

"I decline to say anything further on the subject, and must request that this interview terminate at once."

"Very well," answered Thurwell quietly, as he rose and took his hat. "I will leave you to cogitate on the opinion I must have of you. Good evening;" and the leading woman's champion withdrew, in a sense vanquished, but triumphing in the realization that he had right and justice on his side, and had made his opponent, deep down in her heart, conscious of the fact, with however strong a bravado she may have overlaid it.

He told Barbara of his adventure. She sighed deeply, and then suddenly threw her arms around him.

"Oh, Allan," she exclaimed, "I am so tired of the whole atmosphere! It is always a double life; the two names are typical of it."

"Leave it, then," cried Thurwell, as with an inspiration. "Do you remember what you said to me the first time I ever came here? You told me that real love—the pearl of pearls—gilds poverty as easily as the setting sun tinges the mountain peaks with glory."

"Yes, and I remember, too, that just then Freda threw ashes on my sentiment by announcing that supper was ready. But I know what you would have me do, Allan, and I'd do

it, too, if I had only myself to think of. But there are mother and Freda."

Thurwell's face fell. He *had* forgotten that Barbara's earnings at the theater were the mainstay of the family.

"I can't expect another raise till next January," he answered dolefully, "or I'd say bring the family along and let them enjoy some of the gilding. And even then, I'm afraid, there won't be enough for four. And I'll be hanged if I marry you and let you slave like this!"

"Be patient, dear. Some way out will show itself."

Barbara thought of this little talk many times, as she played her part at night and realized that there were scores in the audience who envied her because she had conquered, in so brief a while, the center of the stage. She thought of it again as she patiently wrote "Violet Brandon" in response to countless requests for her autograph. Again she thought of it when she refused request after request from photographers to sit for her picture, and when she was obliged to dodge cunning interviewers along her path.

When Farrington told her gleefully that souvenirs were being prepared for the hundredth performance, she smiled faintly, and wearily suggested that an appropriate one for herself would be a plaster cast of patience on a monument.

XXIX.

AN UNEXPECTED OUTCOME.

It was the day before the hundredth performance. June had come in piping hot, and Barbara found it almost torture to drag herself through her part. And this night she fainted away at the close of it.

She came to before Thurwell and Farrington got her home, but she was left in such a weakened condition that the doctor positively forbade her to think of acting again until she had had at least a couple of days of complete rest. Farrington knew that the physician was right, but he was well nigh distracted as to what to do in the premises. Barbara had no understudy. Her singing made the matter of a substitute more complex than if mere acting was to be considered.

"And there is so little time to study the part, and tomorrow night an extra occasion, with the whole house sold out in advance!"

Freda caught her fiancé muttering thus to himself, his head held between his hands, as though endeavoring by main force to squeeze out of it an idea that would help him in the dilemma.

"If it's only a matter of knowing the part," she exclaimed, perching herself on the arm of his chair, "I can say it almost all by heart now, just from hearing Barbara so often."

Farrington sprang up like a shot, whirling Freda around into his arms, until her head rested against his breast, where he held her tight, while he exclaimed :

"The very thing! Darling, you've saved us."

"Oh, Don, do you really think I can?"

"If you can't, we'll put up the biggest bluff of our lives. You say you don't care about acting unless you have lots of it to do? Now's your chance. Take Barbara's part, study it like a trooper, and I'll call a rehearsal at noon to-morrow."

Freda began work at once. She was of the temperament that impels its possessors to rush in where angels fear to tread.

"Don't say anything to Barbara about it," Farrington cautioned her, "except to tell her that we've fixed matters all right at the theater. I'll have some notices struck off announcing that, owing to Violet Brandon's sudden indisposition, her sister Rose has kindly volunteered to play her part."

For Mr. Davies had gone to Europe, leaving Farrington in complete charge of all matters concerning his play.

Freda found little trouble in mastering the dialogue ; the songs were the stumbling stones. She had a sweet voice, but one not nearly so strong as Barbara's. Besides, she did not dare try them over at home, for fear of giving her sister an inkling of what she was going to do, and thus disturbing her peace of mind. So the singing was not attempted until the rehearsal at the theater, and the first song was such a fiasco that poor Freda burst into tears on its conclusion.

Farrington was by her side in an instant.

"It's all right," he assured her ; "that only means that you can do better with me in that duet than ever Barbara does. It will make it funnier not to have it first class. Don't you see?"

Freda was too eager to be comforted to note the doubtful compliment in his words. She quickly obliterated the traces of her grief, and the duet was certainly more like the average drawingroom affair of the sort than it was with Barbara's rendering.

"Now, I'll tell you what I'll do," said Farrington. "I'll write in a few lines for us to say apart, just before we are asked to sing, planning to do our worst because we are certain nobody is going to pay any attention to us. Jove, that's going to be a clever bit in the play, and I owe it

all to you, sweet!" and tall Farrington bent down and kissed his promised wife in full view of the entire auditorium of draped and empty seats.

Freda worked harder that day than ever she had thought of doing in all her life. But never before had she had so much to work for. The center of the stage and her affianced lover's approval were the magnets that drew from her her very best.

And when night came she had her reward—not in a sweeping success, but in really pleasing the audience, who called her out first to show their good will, and a second time because they felt she deserved it. Two or three of the papers the next morning gave her complimentary notices in speaking of the souvenir occasion, and not till then did she tell Barbara what she had done.

"And do you love the work, pet?" inquired her sister, a sudden light coming into her own eyes.

"Oh, it's heavenly, almost!" exclaimed the young girl. "And why shouldn't it be with Don to play opposite to?"

"Then keep the part, and make me as happy as you are, pet. Yes, you needn't open those bright eyes so round and look at me like a big interrogation point. I mean it."

"Oh, sister," exclaimed Freda, falling on her knees by the bed, "you're not—not going to die! Somehow, you talk just as they do in books when they call the family around them and give away their most precious possessions."

"But a chance on the stage isn't my most precious possession," returned Barbara, with a smile that was not in the least ethereal. "I didn't take to it because I loved it, but because it was the only thing I could get."

Farrington could not help being pleased at the turn of affairs.

"It means that your mother must consent to our getting married at the beginning of our road season in September," he said.

"And that means that you and I go to the minister's next week, if you say so," said Thurlwell to Barbara, when he heard of the new order of things.

"But mother?" objected Barbara.

"She is to come with us," answered her lover, "and be company for you while I am away during the day."

"Only until your father recovers," answered Mrs. Van Dyke, when this proposition was laid before her.

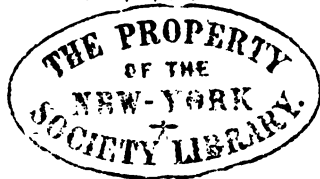
But for that summer she went to a resort on the coast with Freda and Don, whither they took themselves as soon as the theater closed.

Barbara and Thurwell were married when June roses were at their best, and for their wedding trip went to the Berkshires. On their return they settled in a cozy home in upper New York, whose distance from the theatrical center is no drawback in Barbara's eyes.

"For it was a real case of 'Tangled Threads' in our family," she says. "Freda was cut out for the actress all the time."

"While you," rejoins her husband, a twinkle in his eye, "always were and always will be 'A BORN ARISTOCRAT.'"

THE END.



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